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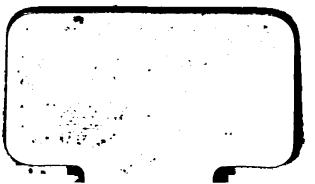

CARNATION.

MAY'S GARDEN,

AND WHERE THE FLOWERS WENT.

A Tale.

WITH EIGHT ILLUSTRATIONS.

SEELEY, JACKSON, & HALLIDAY, 54, FLEET STREET.
LONDON. MDCCCLXXIII.

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MAY'S GARDEN.

CHAPTER I.

THE CROCUS.

"I THINK that piece, from the wall along to this rose tree, would be the best to have, May."

"No, I'm sure mamma would not like me to have that, but this large bed would be just the thing; and, oh, Annie, perhaps mamma would give me the pink may tree as well, for it is just at the corner."

"Well, you are greedy; as if mamma would indeed! Why she wouldn't have a bit of pink may for herself."

"Oh yes, she would, of course. I should give her some as often as she wanted it; there would be plenty for everybody."

"Would there? I know what it would be. You would want to see what the tree looked like when it was all in bloom, and then, when the may was beginning to fade, you would give us each a little tiny bit, and expect us to be so much obliged to you."

"Annie, how unkind you are! I'm sure I often give you things, and then you say that I just dole bits out."

"Oh yes, dear, you're very kind, really I mean it; but last year, you would not let me have one Guelder rose, until you had seen how they looked all out at once, and then my rose was getting faded when I did get it at last."

"Yes, but I shouldn't do it again; besides, the may tree is so big. Fancy keeping that till it was all out!"

"I think you'd better have this piece! Why you'd get a piece of wall."

"A piece of wall. Really, Annie, I'm not so fond of 'wall' as all that. What good would 'wall' do, all covered over with ivy. I couldn't grow anything upon it."

"Oh dear me, what an old fidget you are," said Annie, laughing, "I can't please you. Ask for that piece near my rabbits then, and I shall be able to

cheer you up when I am feeding the pretties, and you are standing wishing the weeds would pull themselves up."

"Oh, I couldn't have that piece! I should have all my flowers eaten up by your tiresome pretties, I know, in no time. No, I like the bit near the may-tree best. Just think, Annie, of all the things I should get in free if I had that, and in those other pieces I should have to buy nearly everything."

"Yes, I wasn't thinking of that."

"You'd have thought of it though, if you were going to buy the flowers."

"Oh yes, of course I should; and I can tell you, I'm oppressed with a tremendous weight of care, for I'm afraid my pretties will eat up all their food before papa gives me my next week's money. What shall I do? oh what shall I do? I wish I could squeeze out some tears."

"Oh, nonsense! Do let us go in and ask mamma for my new piece, or all my courage will go."

"Very well, but mind you tell mamma that I'm going to be your gardener."

"Of course, dear, that will be half the fun? Will it be 'yes' or 'no;' guess."

"I'll guess 'yes.'"

"Then I'll guess 'no,' and then perhaps it will be 'yes.'"

"Mamma," said May, "might I have a new garden? I don't like my old one; it won't grow things properly, and I want to have a lot of flowers."

"Yes, you may have another piece if you will take care of it, but you know you told me weeding made your back ache."

"Yes, it does, but Annie will be my gardener, and she will take up the weeds and rake, and you said before that Smith might dig for me."

"Then how will it be your garden, dear, if Annie and Smith do all the work?"

"Oh, because I am going to buy all the flowers; Annie wants her pocket-money for her rabbits, all but what she gives away. She is not going to buy anything for the new garden."

"I see; very well, you can have a fresh piece. I suppose you want me to come and choose it now?"

"Yes, please; I've been thinking of what I should like."

"Well, what is it?"

"That large bed, with—please, mamma, don't say no—with the pink may at the corner!"

"Oh," laughed Mrs. Aston, "I see there has been

a regular plot about it. Well, you may have the bed, but as for the may, I must think about that. I shall often want some of it myself."

"Oh yes, mamma, of course you must have it whenever you want it. I only want to be able to call it mine."

"And suppose I give it to you, what are you going to do with it, and with all your flowers?"

"I shall make nosegays for you, mamma, and for ourselves, and nurse. Then I shall be able to give papa a rosebud for his button-hole sometimes, when I have a nice one."

"Yes, dear, you can do all this occasionally, but I have a little plan which I think would be very nice for you. Suppose you take flowers to some poor people sometimes? You see, the townspeople haven't got gardens—at least, only a few of them; and they would value a little present of flowers, and as I want you to take an interest in the poor about you, it would be a nice way of beginning."

"Yes, it would, I should like that. Then may I have the may tree, mamma?"

"Yes, on condition that papa and I have what we want. Then you might give little bouquets of flowers to your friends sometimes. You see, you will have a

good many already planted. Let me see, there are four rose bushes, the furze bush—that will soon look glorious—the blue-bells—why, how did they come into this bed?"

"I asked Smith to put them here in the autumn, out of my old garden, because I'm so fond of them, and I meant to ask you for this bed."

"You sly-boots! Suppose I hadn't given it to you?"

"Then I should have got Smith to move them next autumn to my garden; but I thought you would give it to me, mamma."

"Well, I should advise you in future to make sure of a gift before you use it."

"Yes, I will next time. Smith didn't like moving the blue-bells, he called them rubbish; wasn't it rude, mamma?"

"There was no need to say it certainly, but it was a gardener's idea, I suppose. You see, he had not your happy associations with them. If he had had a splendid day in the woods, with tea made in a kettle and boiled under three sticks, and no end of jam and bread, he might have managed to get up a particular affection for blue-bells, especially if the root had been presented by a very dear friend."

"Oh, mamma," laughed Annie, "how funny you are! and fancy calling Archie Campbell May's dear friend."

"Well, I think he is. Isn't he, May?"

"Oh, I like him, and so do you, mamma. You said he was a very nice boy."

"So he is; and now I think it would be a good plan for you both to go and have tea with nurse. You have not been lately, and a little walk will do you good."

The two children were soon on their way to see their old nurse, who lived by herself in a pretty little cottage, with a small garden, about half a mile from the town. She was only forty years of age, but she had fallen and hurt her back when Annie was three years old, so that she was quite unable to keep her place.

Mr. Aston had been very kind to her, and allowed her to live in this cottage rent free; he also gave her five shillings a week. This, with what she earned by lace-work, when she was feeling better between the attacks, enabled her to live comfortably. Mrs. Aston was also very kind, often sending her little delicacies, and keeping her well supplied with clothes. She was very grateful for all this kindness, and she repaid it

with the utmost devotion. She was very fond of the children, particularly of Annie, whom she had nursed from a baby, and they fully returned her affection, and had a great respect for her, for she was a truly Christian woman.

To have tea with nurse was a great treat, only there was a little fear whether she would be well enough to have them.

"We are come to have tea if you can have us, nurse," said May.

"Oh yes, missy, I'm right glad to see you both."

"Let us have coffee, please," said Annie, "tea is so nasty."

"Hear the child! You won't think it nasty when you're my age, my dear, but you shall have your way."

"We have a great piece of news for you, nurse. Mamma has given me a new garden, with the pink may tree as well, and Annie is going to be my gardener."

"Dearie me! I've not heard such a piece of news for some time. I wonder how the garden will be kept?"

"In the most perfect order," said Annie; "I saw you laugh, nursey."

"Annie does pull up weeds beautifully, *quite* by

the roots; and you know how well she raked last year."

"Yes, she is a remarkably clever little woman when she takes pains; and you are going to try, eh?"

"Of course, I am. You're not kind, nursey, to tease me."

"You will try your best then, and I shall not tease. But talking of your garden reminds me of the pot of crocus bulbs you gave to little Tom Evans last November. Do you remember, missy?"

"Yes, how is he, nurse?"

"He's dead and buried, poor lamb! He died before the crocus came up. You know he said he should watch for them coming, and the leaves began to come, and then he died. He bloomed himself in paradise before they bloomed on earth."

"Oh! I'm so sorry he's dead," said May. "I did so hope he'd get better. Did the crocuses come up?"

"Yes, his mother showed them to me, looking so bright and beautiful. Now, I think it would be nice for you both to go and see her after tea, on your way home. She'd be that pleased, and it might comfort her a bit."

"I'm afraid she'd cry all the time," said Annie, "and we shouldn't know what to say."

"Oh yes, we shall," said May, "we can tell her how sorry we are for her."

"Why, nurse, little Tom was as well as I am last year at this time. I remember him running about and playing. He was so funny."

"Yes, and it was all through that wicked lad, Joe Jenkins, that he got so hurt."

"Do tell us about it," said Annie, "how did it happen? We weren't told about that."

"His mother never told anybody before him; he did not like to think of it; he wanted to forgive and forget; but it was in this way:—He was coming home from school with several boys, and two of them began to fight, and one of the boys was much stronger than the other, and got him down, and was stamping upon him, and treating him in a shocking way. Little Tom could not bear this, and he called on the other boys to stop it; but they were afraid of this great fellow, and they wouldn't try. Then Tom ran up to try and help the boy who was down. Well, he was a strong little fellow, and he did manage to help him; but the other one was so angry, that he turned upon Tom, and gave him a dreadful blow on his back, which sent him flying against some large stones,

and his head was so hurt that he was never well again."

"Oh, what a wicked boy!" said May. "Was he put in prison?"

"No; he ran away to sea, and he has not been heard of since."

"I hope he was drowned then, I do," said Annie, with scarlet cheeks and angry eyes.

"Oh, you must not say that, dear. Think how dreadful it would have been if he had died in his sins."

"Yes, nurse; but he ought to have been punished."

"Yes, he ought, and he has been. He ran away from home, as I told you, but it was not because he wanted to go, but because he was frightened when he knew how dreadfully little Tom was hurt; and if he is alive, he must have had a wretched life."

"Nurse, was little Tom a good boy before he was ill?"

"Yes, missy, that was why he was so angry about the fighting. He would never fight, except to help another boy who was getting the worst of it. He loved the Lord Jesus when he was well and strong, and he had been trying to follow Him since

he was four years old. So just think! for five years before he died he had been a little soldier of the cross."

"Five years, nurse! Oh, there is his mother standing at the door."

"How do you do, Mrs. Bretherton?" said nurse. "I've brought my young ladies to see you."

"I'm very glad, indeed. Come in and sit down. I've just been out for some bits of green for my old man's tea."

"Oh, I'm afraid we've come at an awkward time."

"No; he won't be home till eight. He's working at Squire Clifton's, and it takes him an hour to get home; and he is doing a bit of overtime as well."

"Well, the young ladies must be home by six, so we shall not delay you."

"Oh dear, no; come into the front kitchen. I'll just put these in water to keep fresh till I can wash 'em. Well, I'm right glad to see you all. I've not forgotten it was these 'ere two young ladies who brought my poor boy his pot of crocuses. Eh, how he did watch and watch 'em, poor dear! and when the leaves got up a bit, he waited and waited for the flowers; but the weather was so cold, they didn't come up. At last he says to me, 'Mother, I shall be

CROCUS.

in heaven when them crocuses are a-flowering; and when you sees 'em, mother, just think of me a bright angel, bonnier than them flowers will be. They'll fade and die, mother, but I shall live for ever.' Yes, and it's that keeps me up when I gets down-hearted, and I feel as if I couldn't look up. I sees them bright things, and I thinks he'll never fade, and he's bonnier and brighter than them. He'll live for ever."

The tears stood in the poor mother's eyes, but she kept quite calm, only though she seemed to be looking at the crocuses, her eyes had a far-off look, as if she were gazing beyond them.

The children thought they had never seen any flowers so bright, for they were just fully out and the sun was shining upon them.

"I shall always keep them flowers," said the mother rousing herself, "all but one. I'll let you have one, missy, if you like."

May turned a pair of longing eyes to nurse, she did not know whether she ought to ask for it.

Nurse said, "Well, if you can really spare one, Mrs. Bretherton, missy would like one to plant in her new garden next year. She is going to have a new garden, and I know she would like to have one of little Tom's flowers."

"Oh yes, I should indeed," said May. "Am I to have it now then," she whispered to nurse.

"No, my dear, I can't spare it now. I must keep them all for the present," said Mrs. Bretherton, overhearing May's request.

So it was settled that May was to have the bulb before winter. Then they all took their departure, leaving Mrs. Bretherton much happier for their visit.

"I should like to be as good as little Tom, nurse," said Annie, when they were out of sight of the cottage.

"My pet must pray to the Lord Jesus to make her good," said nurse. "Why, little Tom did that, dear, he was not good of himself. He prayed for a new, clean heart, and then when God had given him one, he strove to live like a little soldier, and he died so happily."

"Isn't it nice to think he's brighter than the crocuses?" said May. "I shall always think of little Tom when I see one. Won't you, Annie?"

"Yes, I think I shall."

The next day there was a great piece of news, for Mrs. Aston told the children that their aunts and cousins were coming.

"Oh, how delightful, mamma!" said Annie, as she jumped about the room with delight. "Oh, May, won't it be fun? Fancy, three cousins! quite new ones too, that we've hardly heard of."

"Yes, two boys and a girl," said Mrs. Aston. "Let me see, Kitty will be your age, May, or perhaps a little older."

"Is she ten, mamma?" said May. "Oh, I wish she wasn't ten, because she'll be grander than me."

"My dear May, what nonsense! There is nothing grand in Kitty being a few months older than you are."

May could not help thinking ten was grand.

"How old are the boys, mamma? I hope they are little; I don't like big boys."

"The eldest is twelve, and the youngest seven."

"Then the little boy will be just as old as I am," said Annie. "I'm glad some one will be little as well as me!"

"How is it we've not seen them before, mamma?" said May.

"Because they have lived in Canada, and as your aunt is a Canadian, I have never seen her; but she is very sad, for she has never got over your uncle's death, some years ago now, so you must try to show her that,

although you are only little girls, you know how to show sympathy."

"Yes, we will try, mamma," said May.

"What are the boys' names, mamma?" said Annie.

"Frank and Herbert."

"How funny it will be to have boys to play with," said May. "I shall feel so shy."

A day or two afterwards, the aunt and cousins arrived, and when the front door bell rang, Mrs. Aston called to the children to come and meet them; but they were much too shy, and dared not venture downstairs until Mrs. Aston called them again; and then they came slowly down, looking as if they thought they were going to meet some wild beasts.

Their aunt and Kitty returned their timid kisses very warmly; but Frank was not going to kiss girls, nor be kissed by them, so he held out his hand as far as he could, and would not allow them to get near him. They shrank away looking hot and shy, and left their mother to show their cousins to their rooms.

"Oh, May! isn't he proud?" said Annie, as soon as they were gone.

"I shan't like him, I know, and what a big boy he is! I wish he hadn't come."

"So do I," said May. "But I like the look of

Kitty, only I'm rather frightened, she looked so tall. How tall they all are! Why, Herbert is taller than me, and he is only seven."

"Oh dear! how stiff it will be," said Annie. "We shall have no more happiness till they're all gone."

But after tea it was found that there was some happiness left in the world, for Herbert asked Annie if she had a rocking-horse, and when he found she had one, he proposed that they should have a ride together. This pleased Annie wonderfully, although she had secret fears about keeping on with such a partner. Then May shyly made advances to Kitty, which she received with favour, so that the misery and unhappiness of cousins seemed vanishing into thin air.

After the cousins had stayed a few days, Mrs. Aston proposed that, as it was unusually warm for the time of year, they should venture on a picnic to Bexley Common.

Now the very mention of Bexley Common almost drove May and Annie wild with excitement, for the delights of that lovely part of the country were such as to bring the most happy remembrances to both children. Their joy made Kitty and Herbert almost as full of excitement as they were; only Frank stood

aloof, as if he thought himself quite above picnics of every kind.

It was arranged that they were to have the large waggonette, which would carry them, and the hampers as well. Nurse was to go with them, and they were all to be allowed to help with dinner and tea, as this was a great part of the fun. Frank looked very gloomy, until a bright idea struck him.

"Is there a pond on the common?" he asked May.

"Yes, there is," said May, hoping to please him, "with such a lot of fish in it."

"That's all right," said Frank, as if he thought there was no doubt he would catch plenty.

"Are there donkeys?" asked Herbert. "They are so jolly."

"No, there are some ponies," said Annie, "but mamma won't let us ride upon them. They have no saddles or bridles, and they are not tame."

"*Tame!*" said Frank, scornfully, "you might be talking of tigers; I mean to try them whether they are tame or not."

"But mamma would not let us," said Annie.

"Oh, never mind mamma," said Frank; "if you don't peach she'll know nothing about it."

May and Annie stood horror-struck at such words, and Kitty looked ashamed of her brother; but he walked carelessly away, whistling a tune. May stood considering for a little while, when she said to Kitty, "Do you love Frank?"

"Not just this minute," said Kitty; "but I love him sometimes. He's not always cross, you know."

"Well, I don't think I could love him at all, if he were my brother, he's so disagreeable."

"Mamma says we ought to love everybody," said Annie, looking very wise.

"Do you love Frank?" said May.

"N—o," said Annie, laughing, feeling that she was caught; "but I ought to."

"Oh yes, I know I ought to," said May; "but the puzzle is how to begin."

"Missy," called nurse, "it's time for you all to get ready."

There was a general scamper immediately, and the deep question of how we are to love those who don't love us was for the time forgotten. I cannot tell you the delights of the drive to Bexley; the trees looked so lovely in their light green foliage, and there was such a delicious scent, and such a

fresh breeze, which blew about the hats and ribbons, and altogether such pretty sights and sounds, that the children were almost beside themselves. Even Frank lost some of his gloominess, and condescended to laugh.

When at last Bexley was reached, there was a great consultation as to what should be done first. Frank said he should go and fish, and Herbert begged to go with him. So they went off, to the no small relief of the girls, except Annie, who was sorry to lose Herbert.

Then a great unpacking commenced—just nurse and the girls; for Mrs. Aston and Mrs. Edmunds went into the wood, to sit quietly until dinner was ready. But when the contents of the hampers were turned out, it was found that there was no bread! Cook had actually forgotten that very necessary article. Annie said she could make her dinner of tart very well. But nurse said mamma and aunt could not, if she could, and there was not enough tart for everybody's dinner. Then May suggested that they should all go in different directions, and get bread from the farmhouses. But nurse again bjected, as the farmhouses were, most of them, miles away, and, in fact, there was no house near but the

little inn where the horses were put up, and here nurse feared there was very little bread. May and Kitty ran off to see what could be got, and they soon returned with a quantity of oat-cake, but only one loaf. So the loaf was put aside for mamma and aunt, and the children decided that it would be fun eating oat-cake with meat, and that it would be delicious for tea, with plenty of butter.

Dinner passed off very merrily, and was all the greater fun, because there was so little bread; and after dinner Annie declared that they were going to have the most delightful afternoon they had ever had on Bexley Common.

"How do you know that?" said Mrs. Aston. "It is not right to speak as if we could do anything without God's permission."

"I mean, I hope we shall have a very nice time, mamma."

"Wouldn't it be good fun to gather lots of flowers and make wreaths?" said May.

"I don't think you'll find lots of flowers, missy," said nurse. "I've only seen a few primroses. You mustn't think that summer's come, although it is so warm."

"Let us go after the boys, and watch them fish,"

said Annie, "and then we'll have some games, and then we'll make tea, and light the fire, and have such fun, and go home in the dark, and have supper, and never go to bed!"

"Annie, Annie," said Mrs. Aston, reprovingly. But Annie was flying away as fast as she could.

CHAPTER II.

THE FURZE.

"MAMMA, I should like to go and see old Peggy, this afternoon," said May, "when I've learnt my lessons. The other day, when she came, she thought my furze bush so beautiful—'bonnie,' she called it—and when I told her that a furze bush had been the means of saving my life, she wanted to know all about it, for she's been away, and she had not heard about my having been run away with."

"Very well, dear, you may go if you feel strong enough, and Emma can take you, as she is going that way, and then she can call for you on her return."

So in the afternoon May went to see Peggy Cooper, an old woman who had worked for Mrs. Aston, now and then, as charwoman. She was such a cheerful old body, that the children were really fond of her. May was a special favourite, because she was rather

like (or at least Peggy fancied she was) a child Peggy had lost.

"I'm o'er glad to see ye, missy," was the greeting May received, "and I've been a-thinking and a-thinking about that run-away ye've had. Nae wonder ye look so puir and white, my bonnie. Come, sit ye down and tell me all about it."

"But where shall I put this furze?" said May. "I've brought you enough for the table, and the mantel-shelf, and the top of the drawers."

"Well, I never! I was so took up with you, as I didn't notice the yellow stuff. It is bonnie, real bonnie. I shall be as grand as th' Queen. Here's mugs, but I maun hae a glass for th' table. There, they do look fine! But I want to know all about the run-away, so now we's settled, we'll hae it out."

"After you had gone to see your son, mamma said we might have a picnic to Bexley Common. It was so warm, and just like summer, and our cousins went with us. You know they came before you went away."

"Yes, I remember."

"Well, Frank was a very naughty boy then, and he wanted to ride on one of the rough ponies that a man had on the Common. They had no saddles, and

FURZE.

only rope for bridles, but Frank rode one, and kept on very well; and then, although he knew mamma did not wish us to ride, he persuaded me and Kitty to get on two of the ponies. It was very wrong of us, for we knew mamma and aunt did not wish it.

"Well, just at first it was very nice, and we kept on so well. Then Frank frightened my pony, and it flew away, oh, at such a dreadful pace! I was so frightened, and it seemed as if all the wicked things I had ever done came into my mind. I held on with all my might, and I tried to pray, but it seemed as if God would not hear me, and it took all my strength to hold on, so that I felt as if I could not think—only things came into my head that I had done wrong. It was so dreadful, and then I saw an old man coming along, and I screamed to him to stop the pony, and he tried, but I think it knocked him down, and we only seemed to go all the faster. Then we came right into the middle of a lot of geese, and I thought I must come off, and then they would peck at me, but I stuck on, though I'm sure the pony trod on some of them, for they made such a fearful noise. Then we flew on and on, and I remembered a great pond there was, and I thought, suppose the pony should go right into it, and I should be drowned, and it seemed so

horrible, that mamma thinks it must have made me faint, and all of a sudden I felt I was going, and I remembered no more until I found myself in a little cottage, and a woman and girl with me. I was so frightened at first, and I couldn't think where I was, but I felt so glad to find I wasn't dead, for I thought I should be killed when I felt myself tumbling off the horse.

"But oh, Peggy, it was so wonderful. I was thrown on to a furze bush, and the doctor told mamma that it most likely saved my life, because it bent under my weight. I shall always like furze now, and I'm so glad I've got some in my garden."

"It was a mercy that ye fell so well; but ye maun hae got pricked wi' the furze."

"Oh yes, I did. Just look at my neck and arms; the marks show now; and the spikes had run into my dress, so that Mrs. Jones said she had some trouble in getting me free."

"How was it she found ye?"

"Her little boy, Jim, was playing, and he saw me thrown, and ran in to his mother, and said a girl in white had come off her horse on to the bush. He said I was in white, though it was only a light dress."

"Dearie me! ye might hae had all your bones broke."

"Yes, Peggy, I'm so glad that I'm all right, that is that I've no bones broken. Just suppose I'd been hurt, and died like little Tom."

"Yes, indeed! ye musn't be a-disobeying of your mamma, missy. But I want to know how they all got at ye."

"Oh, mamma, and auntie, and nurse, and all of them came in the waggonette. They got a man to trace the pony's footsteps, and they inquired for me at the very house where I was. Mamma and nurse were so frightened when they saw me; they said I looked so ill, and I did not come round for some time after they came in, for just before they arrived I had fainted again."

"I should think Master Frank must have been mighty frightened."

"Yes, I believe he was; but, do you know, he has not said anything to me yet about it. He hasn't even said he was sorry. But I think he is, for he is never unkind now."

"I should think not. But go on, I want to know how long ye stayed in the country."

"I was there more than a week before I could be

moved, and then I was brought home; they were all so kind to me, but mamma was so sorry I had disobeyed her."

"Yes, missy, ye maun never do that ag'in."

"No, Peggy, I hope not. We had such a nice talk about it last night. Mamma was so kind, and she has quite forgiven me; I told her how very, very sorry I was. I had told her before, but I explained it all to her, and she loves the furze as much as I do, and she says I must always have it in my garden."

"Ay, ye must, my dear. I allers thought it was a bonny thing, but now I'll think it bonnier than ever. Some folks says it's common, but it's 'cause they're common, it strikes me!"

"Mamma says, too, that when we get used to things we don't think them half so beautiful, but it hasn't been so with the furze, as I never thought it so pretty before. And, oh, Peggy! I wanted to tell you that there was a poor cripple at this cottage. Such a funny little thing. She used to sit by me for such a time, and only talk when she thought I should like it. I got so fond of her, and I am sure she loves me very much. Mamma is going to try and get her into a hospital for children, where she thinks

she might get much better, and learn to do something."

"It's right kind on your mamma, I'm sure; I hope she'll get good on't."

"Yes, I hope she will; and, oh, Peggy, she was so kind to Annie. What do you think she did? Annie told me she was crying away, and feeling very miserable, and Jane came up to her with a great brown mug of milk in one hand, and a piece of tart on a plate in the other. Such a great piece! and she wanted Annie to have it all, to comfort her. Annie said she couldn't help laughing, it looked so funny, and there was such a lot of it, but, however, she eat it all up, and drank the milk, never thinking that she was eating up all Jane's supper! for actually, she found out afterwards, that Jane went to bed without anything at all, for she had given up all her mother had got for her, to try and make Annie stop crying. Wasn't it kind? Nurse found it out and told us about it."

"She's a kind-hearted lassie, I's nae doubt, missy. She wadna' like parting with ye?"

"No, she cried so, that mamma's promised she shall come and see us before she goes to the hospital. Her mother came over last week and told us she was

always talking about it, and that she even dreamed about it at night. Isn't it funny?"

"Nay, ye little think what small things gives pleasure to poor folks, as haven't much to get pleasure from."

"Here's Emma, so I must say good-bye now, Peggy, for mamma said I must not stay very long, and she told me to tell you that she was going to send you some more liniment for your rheumatism."

"I'm sure I'll be very thankful, and tell your mamma, with my duty, that I feels better for going to my son's, and that he was very kind; tell her that I only got back on Wednesday. I wanted to tell her t'other day, when I saw your furze, but she were out."

Not long after this, Mrs. Edmunds said they must really leave in a few days, for she had already stayed some time longer than she had meant to do.

This piece of news seemed to make a wonderful difference to Frank; neither of the other children liked the thoughts of going, but Frank seemed more gloomy than ever. May couldn't help noticing this, and it struck her that, perhaps, after all, Frank was sorry that he had to go, so as she happened to be in the garden alone with him, she said—

"Oh, Frank, I'm sorry you're all going so soon, I wish you could have stayed a little longer."

Frank opened his eyes very wide, and said—

"I thought you hated me, you don't mean you'd like me to stay!"

"Yes, I should," said May, "because you've not been unkind since my accident, and I think you're sorry about it, and you don't seem happy."

"No, I'm not," said Frank, "I'm a brute, I know, but if you'll forgive me I'll be your friend, *I will*. But I frightened your pony on purpose, though I did not want to hurt you, only to get you into a scrape; because I heard you say I was so disagreeable, if I was your brother you couldn't love me, and I thought I'd be revenged."

"Oh, I didn't mean you to hear that; and, besides, I'm sure I could love you now."

"Then we'll be friends," said Frank, "I wish we had been before, for I like you."

"There's Kitty coming, please don't tell her," and then he moved away to another part of the garden.

May kept the secret of her friendship with Frank, although she longed to tell some one, particularly her mamma, because she wanted her to think better of him; but though she tried to persuade Frank to let

her say something, he would not consent to it, but said he would make all straight before he went.

May was obliged to be satisfied with this, and also with the odd sort of friendship Frank showed her; for, before his brother and sister he took no more notice of her than he had done formerly; but when they were alone they had some long talks.

One day he said to her, "It's no use trying to be good with such a horrid temper as I've got. I'm sure I'm meant to be bad."

"I'm sure you're not," said May. "Mamma says we're all born sinful, but then we can be made new and clean, if we come to the Lord Jesus. I'm sure He could make you different, if you would ask Him."

"I couldn't be made good, that's certain," said Frank.

"Oh yes, you could, if you would pray."

"I never pray," said Frank; "the fellows would laugh, and I should have cold water thrown over me, and all sorts of things done to me, if I did. I couldn't pray at school, and I should think it sneaking to pray at home, and not at school."

"Yes, it would be; but, then, couldn't you begin here? and then, if you asked God, He would give you strength to pray at school."

"I might try; but it would be awful at school. You have no idea."

"But couldn't you get aunt to send you to another school?"

"I am going to another. I'm going to Eton. I couldn't go all the way to Canada to school; but then I know it will be just as bad, or worse, at Eton, because I know fellows who have been there."

"How dreadful! But aunt wouldn't let you go, if she knew, would she?"

"Oh yes; she'd only laugh, and say other boys had to do it. But she doesn't know what it's like."

"But I'll get mamma to tell her."

"Oh no. I'll try your plan; it might do. I suppose people who've been burnt to death had some help. I'll try it on. I'll begin to-day, and I'll write to you when I'm at school, if you won't show the letter."

"No, I won't show it, if you'll not put anything in mamma wouldn't like, because we have to show them unless they are from some one who is careful."

"She won't think I'm careful, I know; but I don't mind aunt seeing the letter, if she won't tell anybody."

"I'm sure she won't, if you don't put anything

wrong in it. Except if they treat you very badly, Frank, she would think she ought to tell aunt."

"Oh, I shan't tell you if they do. I shall only tell you how I get on about praying."

"But I shall want to know."

"No, I shan't tell you till the holidays, so don't bother me. Let's go and look at the rabbits."

May saw Annie and Herbert were coming, and so she knew it was no use trying to talk any more.

Frank didn't give her another opportunity of a talk. He seemed very sorry to go, in his way, and he said "Good-bye" quite affectionately; but he said no more, and it was quite two months before May heard from him.

Soon after the aunt and cousins had gone, Mrs. Aston got an order for little Jane to go to the hospital. She was to be there in a week from the time the order was received, so Mrs. Aston said she must come and spend a day or two with the children before she went. Mrs. Aston sent the pony carriage for her, and when she drove up to the door, May and Annie ran out to welcome her.

She looked as if she didn't know whether to laugh or to cry, and she seemed to have lost all her courage. The children took her upstairs, and showed

her the little room near theirs which she was to have. The poor child seemed quite overwhelmed, so Mrs. Aston took her into the nursery (which was now used as a play-room), and made her lie down on the sofa and rest. Then, after a time, May and Annie went and sat with her, and got her to talk.

"Do you feel very poorly?" said Annie.

"No, I only feels tired a bit; but it all seems so grand and strange like, I don't think I can stop."

"Oh yes, you must," said May. "We're not grand. What have you been doing since I left?"

"Knitting, and helping mother a bit. Jim's gone to school again. I'm so glad; I want him to be a scholard."

"What's a scholard?" said Annie.

"Why, don't you know? I thought you knew everything."

"Oh no," laughed Annie; "I wish I did, and then I should have no lessons."

"I suppose a scholard means a school-boy," said May.

"Yes," said Jane, "one as learns—gets learning, you know.'

May saw Annie was laughing, so she gave her a reproving look, for she didn't want Jane to see.

"Shall you like going to the hospital?" said Annie, looking as grave as a judge.

"I shall like to be taught; but I can't bear the thought of them doctors. I'm afraid they will hurt so."

"Nurse told me she didn't think they would hurt at all. She said she had a little cousin there once, who wasn't well, like you, and they did not hurt him at all, and he came out so much better."

"Oh, how nice!" said Jane. "I shouldn't care for anything if I were well, but I can't bear to see mother working and working so hard; and I can't help her a bit, except by knitting, and it fetches so little."

"Do you think you could come and see my rabbit?" said Annie; "they are so pretty."

"Yes, if you'll give me my crutches. Thank you, miss."

"Well, I never seed such pretty things," said Jane; "but what a lot they must eat?"

"They do," said Annie. "It takes nearly all my pocket money, and they eat a quantity of grass, besides."

"How much money do you get?" said Jane.

"I have a shilling a week."

"A shilling a week! What a lot! Don't it seem wrong to give it all to the rabbits?"

"I don't spend it all on the rabbits," said Annie, "but I don't think it's wrong at all; they must be fed."

"Yes, but poor folks is starving," said Jane, "and mother says it's wicked to keep a cat, because it eats so much."

"Well, we have three," said May, "two in the house, and one in the stables, and I don't think mamma would let us have them if it was wicked."

"We haven't got a lot of food like you have; I 'spose that's it," said Jane. "It will be nice always to have enough, and mother 'll have enough too now."

"Are you hungry now?" said Annie. "It's just tea-time. Do come in."

"I am a bit hungry, but I'm not in a hurry."

"I have often been so cross, because tea was not ready the minute I wanted it," said May.

Jane smiled. "Poor folks gets used to being hungry sometimes," she said. "But you haven't to get used to anything."

"I'm not used to being run away with," said May, smiling.

"No, but I mean other things. Aren't you happy all day when you're well?"

"No, indeed, I'm not; I have my lessons to do, and they are very hard sometimes, and always tiresome. I think I should often be nearly quite happy if it was not for them."

"How queer," said Jane, "I should like to do lessons all day."

"Have you ever done lessons all day?" said Annie.

"No, I haven't."

"Then don't want to," said Annie; "you'd soon be tired of it. When I'm at lessons I think of my pretty rabbits, and there are two long lines of spelling to be learnt before I can get to them, or some history, or something. Oh, it's horrid!"

"But what a queer lady you'd be when you grew up, if you didn't know how to read," said Jane. "If I were a lady wouldn't I learn!"

"That's right, Jane," said Mrs. Aston, who had overheard Jane's remark, "teach them to value their privileges."

"Oh, mamma, we were only talking about lessons being tiresome—making us unhappy, I mean," said May, "because Jane thought I had no troubles."

"If you have no worse ones than lessons, my dear, you will do very well."

"But, mamma, you said one day, that lessons were a real trouble to children, and that we ought to do our duty about them as if they were grown-up troubles."

"I used words to that effect, May, and I meant it, and I also meant that if, when you were grown up, you had no worse troubles than lessons are to you now, you would not have very serious trials."

"Being hungry is much worse than lessons, mamma, isn't it?" said Annie, "and Jane has sometimes not had enough to eat."

"Yes, it is much worse, but I hope Jane won't suffer from that any more," said Mrs. Aston, looking at her kindly.

Jane coloured up. "Oh, ma'am," she said, "I didn't mind the hunger so much as the pain; besides, I've not often been real hungry; it's been more faint like."

"I hope you will get stronger and better at the hospital," said Mrs. Aston, cheerfully, "and as to the little talk we have had, I want you all to remember that God sends troubles to rich and poor, and He knows all we feel about them. He gives us what He

thinks best, and we must try and get all the good out of them we can. Now go in to tea, and take care of Jane."

"Mayn't I come with you while you dress for dinner, mamma?" said Annie, wistfully, lingering behind.

"No, darling, go and have your tea with May and Jane, and I will come and see you in bed."

An hour or two after tea, Jane was helped to bed by the children's maid; and when she laid herself down in the soft bed, she felt as if she were in fairy-land.

Then she heard Mrs. Aston speaking to the children in the next room, and to her great joy she came in to her too.

"How are you, Jane?" said Mrs. Aston gently.

But there was no answer, only a heavy sob, and two large tears trickling down Jane's white cheeks.

"Why, what is the matter?" said Mrs. Aston, looking surprised.

"Oh, ma'am, you are so kind, and it is so beautiful here, and I don't want to go to the hospital."

"But you must go to try and get well, and then you could help your mother. You want to be a help to her, don't you?"

"Oh yes, ma'am, but I wish we could come and be your servants."

"Well, you must go and try to get well before you could be a servant, and then some day you may be one."

"Here, ma'am?" said Jane with brightening eyes.

"Yes, perhaps here, but that must not be thought of now. I do want you to think of the good Shepherd, Jane, who carries the lambs in his bosom. You know who I mean, don't you?"

"Yes, ma'am, the Saviour."

"Yes, I want you to be one of his lambs, trying to follow Him always. He will make you one if you ask Him, and He will love you more than anybody else. He does that now, and it will be good for you to think of this when you are at the hospital."

"Yes, ma'am."

"Good night, Jane. I hope you will sleep well."

"Good night, ma'am, I'll not forget," said Jane.

And she did not. The next day her mother came to take her to the hospital, and she was quite surprised at her brightness. She could hardly believe she was the same child who had left her the day before.

But Jane felt she could not tell any one that she

wished to love and follow the good Shepherd. She had often heard of Him and read about Him, when she was well enough to go to the Sunday-school, but she had never wished to follow Him before. Now that this wish had entered her heart, her fear and dread of the hospital seemed almost to go, and she said good-bye to Mrs. Aston and the children quite cheerfully.

In fact, everything seemed brighter for little Jane, for she never forgot that some day she might perhaps live with Mrs. Aston, and attend to the young ladies; then she would save such lots of money for mother, and buy Jim no end of new tops; quite forgetting that when she was a woman, Jim would be a man, with desires above new tops.

CHAPTER III.

THE RED THORN.

"We haven't been for such a time to see Aunt Sarah and Aunt Martha, mamma," said Annie, one fine morning. "Don't you think we might go and see them to-day, and perhaps they would ask us to tea?"

"Which do you want to do? See Aunt Sarah and Aunt Martha, or have tea?"

"Both, mamma."

"Well, if I were Aunt Sarah, I should prefer that you came to see me without any tea in the matter."

"Oh, I shall like to see them without tea, but I enjoy myself a great deal more with it."

"That's one way of getting out of it. Well, I'm going to drive to Wrexall this afternoon, so I will drop you both at Elm House, and we will ask the old ladies if they can keep you to tea, and then I will send for you in the evening. It will be Aunt Martha's

birthday to-morrow, May. I think it would be a good thing if you were to take her some pink may. She always likes to have some for her birthday."

"Oh yes. I'm so glad you thought of it, mamma; she will be so pleased."

These old ladies were two Miss Ansteds, whose fathers and grandfathers for many generations had lived in Woodchester. They had been great travellers in many lands, for they were very well off; but for the last eight years they had been living quietly in their native town, in the old family house. It was such an old-fashioned place, with numbers of windows looking on the street, and a large walled garden behind. Everything about the place seemed old—even the servants matched the furniture, having a faded, dried-up appearance about them, which made them look very quaint and odd. The garden, though as old-fashioned as the rest of the place, was very bright and beautiful, but only with old-fashioned flowers; not one new specimen was allowed, for Aunt Sarah was thoroughly of the old school, and, though she loved young people, she disliked all new improvements and all new notions.

You will, perhaps, wonder how it was that May and Annie were so fond of going there; but when

you hear all the delights in store for them, you will wish you could have gone there too.

First of all came the old ladies themselves; they were so very kind and loving that they won the confidence and affection of everybody, but especially of children, who were allowed to roam about the old rooms and passages, and to play, to their hearts' content, with old-world toys upstairs in the nursery of long ago. Then even the kitchens were allowed to be explored; and though the cook looked as if she had come out of a band-box, she could laugh, and allow all sorts of liberties with her beautifully-kept kitchens and cupboards; and the treasures to be found in the latter were almost beyond comprehension. Then there was the garden, where grew no end of strawberries, apples, pears, plums, gooseberries, currants; and, last, but not least, were the delightful stories Aunt Sarah told. It really seemed as if the time would never come when she had no more to tell. You will not wonder now, I think, that May and Annie were very fond of going to see the old ladies, and especially of staying to tea. So, when Mrs. Aston's carriage stopped at the door, there were two beating hearts, hoping for an invitation; and when the old butler brought out word that his

mistresses would be very glad if the young ladies would stay, there were two very bright faces, and two happy little people, with a very large bunch of may, got out of the carriage and walked into the house.

"And how are you, missy?" said the butler; for he was quite a friend of the family, and always had a little chat on his own account.

"I am nearly quite well, thank you," said May.

"She has been run away with, and might have been killed," said Annie. "She was thrown on some furze, or the doctor said she would have been killed most likely."

"Yes, I heard," said Henly. "Well, missy, you won't be going against orders on them wild things again, I should think. I'm right glad you were caught on the furze. Why, you ought always to wear a bit in your button-hole."

"Button-hole, Henly! I don't wear a coat."

"But you've got button-holes, missy; leastways my missis has, for I see her making 'em."

The children laughed, and Annie took his hand while he led them through the hall, and then down a long passage to a bright morning room, where sat the two old ladies, quite close to one another, holding hands. Aunt Sarah was very handsome, and

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looked lively; but Aunt Martha was blind, and she had a sweet, sad face, which, one could see, had known deep sorrow.

When the children appeared with the large bunch of red thorn, the old ladies quickly unclasped their hands, and Aunt Sarah rose to kiss them, and then they went up to Aunt Martha, and gently kissed her.

"We have brought you some pink may, out of my new garden, for Aunt Martha's birthday," said May.

"That is very good of you," said Aunt Martha. "I always used to have a wreath of it on my birthday, when I was young, but I never wore it after Edward died—no, I couldn't after that. But I always like some in the room, dears; not too much though, for it has a strong scent."

"Come, and I will show you where our old red thorn tree used to be," said Aunt Sarah, as she stepped out into the garden. "I never told you we used to have one. This is the old stump of it, you see it is all covered with ivy now, that you can hardly tell what it is, but it was once part of a beautiful tree, and when we were children, our brother used to climb up into it, and get such pretty pieces of may, and, as Aunt

Martha told you, he always made her a wreath on her birthday."

"Didn't he make you a wreath too on yours, Aunt Sarah?" said Annie.

"No, I didn't care for wreaths. I was a very different child from Aunt Martha. She was always sweet and amiable, but I prided myself on trying to be grown up before my time."

"You were not always good?" said Annie wonderingly.

"No, indeed," said Aunt Sarah.

"I wish you would tell us about it," said Annie, thinking it would be refreshing to hear of any one so good as aunt having been naughty.

Aunt Sarah smiled, and then, turning to May, said, "I hear you have been running away, May."

"I did not mean to run away, but it was very wrong to get on the pony's back."

"I am glad you confess at once you were wrong, and I hope it will teach you a lesson to obey your mother in future."

May coloured and the tears came into her eyes.

"Oh, Aunt Sarah, I shouldn't think of getting on a pony's back again without mamma's leave."

"No dear, perhaps not, but you might think of

disobeying her in some other way, and I want this lesson you have had to affect your future life, and to be a warning to you. Annie wants me to tell you both about when I was a naughty girl, so after tea I will tell you a story about myself and my brother."

May did not like the idea of the story, she thought it might refer to her fault rather too much; but Annie, not having an uneasy conscience, wished very much to hear Aunt Sarah's tale; so as soon as tea was over she asked for it.

Aunt Martha laughed. "Oh, Annie!" she said, "I'm afraid you're too fond of tales. Don't you think it would be better for Aunt Sarah to read out some history?"

"No, thank you," said Annie, "I want Aunt Sarah to begin this very minute."

"Then I must make haste," said Aunt Sarah. "Once upon a time——"

"But do tell how old you were first," said May.

"I was thirteen, and Aunt Martha was eleven, and my brother sixteen. Now I shall have to begin again."

"I beg your pardon, Aunt Sarah," said May, "but I did so want to know how old you were."

"It's very easy to begin again. Once upon a time

we lived in Russia, as you have heard me say before, with our father, who was a physician. Our mother died when we were very little girls, much younger than you are, and we had only one brother, and we were very fond of him, he was such a kind, noble-hearted youth."

"He was a dear, dear boy," said Aunt Martha.

"Well, as I said, we were very fond of him, and he was very fond of us, and he was our father's favourite. At first we lived in St. Petersburg, but after a time the nobleman, to whom our father was physician, moved to his estate in the country, and we went with him, and had a pretty house in his grounds.

"Now before I go on, Annie, you tell me what kind of climate they have in Russia. Is it hot, or cold, or temperate like ours?"

"Very cold, freezing," said Annie, quite pleased that it was such an easy question.

"Yes, it is very cold, indeed, and so we found it, I can tell you. We had to have double windows, and stoves always lighted, and the people dress in fur, and do all they can to keep out the cold. Well, our father bought a new sledge—you both know what that is—and I was very anxious to try it; I thought it would be so delightful. I asked my father to allow me to go out in it, and for Edward to drive

it, but he would not allow it, and he said he should be very angry if we attempted it. So I gave up the idea then, but I felt very cross about it in my heart, though I did not show it outwardly. My father did not know that he had such a naughty girl, or he would have locked me in my room, and I wish he had. Don't you, Martha?"

"Yes, yes, dear, for your own sake I wish he had."

"Yes, you hear even Aunt Martha wishes he had. But he did not, and one day he went out and said he should not be back until the next day, and all of a sudden the wicked thought came into my mind that I would persuade Edward to take me out in the new sledge. So I went to Edward, and said I wished he would take me out for a little drive in the sledge; but he said he did not think our father would like it, but he did not know, nor did Martha, that our father had quite forbidden it.

"So I said, 'Oh, it will not matter going a little way in the park. We cannot take any harm.'

"So Edward consented, thinking we could not get lost if we kept within the park. He forgot that the snow was so very deep that a low wall on one side was completely covered, and that therefore we should not know when we were in the park or not. But I

knew this, only I thought I should be sure to know when to stop, and I did not fear any danger, so that I had my way and my pleasure.

"So we started. We both wrapped up well in warm furs, and off we went at a great pace, flying along! I thought it was delightful, and I enjoyed it so much, and Edward was so pleased at my excitement, that he forgot when it was time to turn, and I did not remind him. At last, he said he thought we must make our way back, or Martha would be nervous."

"Yes, yes, dear boy," interrupted Aunt Martha, "he was always so thoughtful for me, and so were you, Sarah, my dear, though you do not say so."

"I was not then, Martha, for I did not like returning; but I gave in to Edward, and back we went, as we thought, but it was anything but going back, for we had got far away from the park, and we were only getting farther and farther away, and nearer and nearer to the dreadful woods, where the wolves make their home.

"As we went on and on, I thought we were a long time getting home, and I said to Edward, 'It seems to take a long time to get back again;' and then the horrible thought struck me, that we had perhaps wandered beyond the park, and I almost screamed, 'Oh,

Edward, we must have been beyond the park. Do you think we are on the right track?'

"'Don't be frightened, Sarah,' he said, 'but I have been suspecting for some time that we must have lost our way; but be brave and trust in God, you know we are in his hands.'

"'But oh, Edward,' I said in anguish, 'I have disobeyed papa, for he said I was not to go out in the sledge, but I wanted so to come, that I would not tell you, and now, oh, Edward! suppose we are frozen to death, I shall have killed you and myself too!' and then I sobbed and felt as if I was undone and lost for ever!

"Poor Edward! he was in great distress, I could tell, although he did not say a word at first. Then in a low steadfast voice, he said, 'Pray, Sarah, pray for forgiveness. You know he that confesseth and forsaketh his sin shall have mercy. We must both try and keep up our strength, and use all our endeavours to reach home.'

"I cried to Edward to pray, I felt too wicked; and so in a low voice he asked for pardon and guidance, and with his prayer the cloud of sin and misery was lifted a little, so that I could help to think what we had better do; but oh! my heart was heavy as lead, I could not tell you what I felt.

"Edward looked all round to see which way to turn, and then he chose what he thought would be the most likely road to lead home. On and on we went, but we seemed to get no nearer, and soon we saw we were approaching a pine forest.

"Now, I must tell you, my dears, that the pine forests in Russia extend for miles and miles; and as the wolves live in and about them, it is very dangerous to go near them, unless you are well protected, especially at night, when they prowl about and often hunt in great packs.

"Edward well knew our danger, better than I did, for he had travelled with our father in the winter, when they had seen something of these creatures. Suddenly, we heard a howling noise in the distance, at which I was terrified, and the horse pricked up his ears, and flew along, in his fright nearly upsetting us. Edward did not speak, but when I cried out, he said, 'Keep quiet, dear, and pray. You know that verse, "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble."'

"I knew that God was *his* refuge, but would He be *mine?* I felt I must ask Him to be, there was no other hope or help; and so I prayed really and truly, as I had never prayed before, and my great and heavy sin

seemed to roll away. It did roll away, my dears, to the foot of Christ's cross, and that terrible hour was made to me the beginning of a new life.

"But though I was not in such dreadful fear about my soul, I was terrified, and so was Edward, at our fearful danger. On and on we flew, and on and on came the wolves, and we felt they were gaining upon us. Edward urged on the poor frightened horse, who was quite aware of the peril he was in, and I felt as if I must push the sledge along as I pressed forward with my feet against the front part of it. Still on we flew, and on came the wolves, till in the twilight I could see them, like a dusky cloud, getting nearer and nearer."

"Did they catch you?" asked Annie, breathlessly.

"No, they did not catch me, dear, or I should not have been here, nor did they catch my brother."

"Who did they catch then?" said May.

"Wait a moment, I shall soon have finished. Just as we felt ourselves on the point of being devoured, Edward saw a light, and he immediately urged and cheered on the brave horse, who, though almost spent, exerted all his remaining strength, and reached the door of a wood hut, just in time for us to get inside. But our poor noble horse was devoured

by the wolves; we tried to get him loose from the sledge, and then we could have got him into the hut, but there was not time.

"Edward burst into tears, and cried like a child, he was so grieved for the noble creature, and then, when he was calmer, he made me kneel down with him, and we gave thanks for our deliverance. When we rose, we noticed the old man who had opened the door for us was the only person there, and we found he had been busy getting us hot brandy-and-water, which revived and refreshed us; but Edward seemed much more overcome than I was; he was always a very delicate boy, and before morning he was in a high fever."

"Oh, what did you do?" said May. "Weren't you frightened?"

"I was, indeed. I thought, 'Suppose Edward should die, and all through my disobedience.' I entreated the old man to fetch my father, but he dared not venture out, because of the wolves. I think I should have gone mad if my father had not arrived the next day, but he had traced us, and came to our assistance.

"He did not say a word to me, although he knew that all this trouble was through my fault. I think he saw that I had suffered terribly. We had to nurse Edward in

the hut, for he could not be moved, and by the time he was getting better, the winter had gone, and we were able to return home safely. Then, one evening, I crept up to my father, and confessed all my wickedness. He was very tender and loving, but very grave, and I shall never forget how he showed me that in disobeying him I had broken God's commandment.

"But the most dreadful thing was that Edward never got strong again. We came back here before the winter came on, and in a year he died. Aunt Martha had one more birthday first, and though he was too ill to pluck the pink may, he made her the wreath, and put it on for her, and we all sat together in this room, and listened to the birds, and enjoyed the scent of the flowers. Edward was so gentle and sweet to me, and he made me promise that I would not reproach myself any more for my disobedience and the consequences. He said my sin was forgiven, and I must live as one forgiven. Then he said he did not think he should have lived to be a man anyhow, for he knew before the fever, that he was not at all strong, and of course, he said, I had not meant to injure him."

"Oh no," said Aunt Martha, "your Aunt Sarah nearly killed herself with nursing him, and she was,

and is, one of the most loving sisters that ever were born."

"Come, come, Martha," said Aunt Sarah, "you are always making me out better than I am. Well, to finish, dears. I have told you this long tale to show you that we can never know the evil consequences that may follow one sin. So when you are tempted to disobey, pray for strength to resist."

"I should have thought you wouldn't like pink may, Aunt Martha," said Annie.

"Should you, dear? You would not have looked at it again, eh?"

"No; it's all so miserable."

"I ought to be the one not to like the pink may," said Aunt Sarah, "but I love it, because it reminds me of my brother and his sweetness, and Aunt Martha loves it for the same reason. We often talk of our brother, although it's all these years since we lost him. It is beautiful to think of those who have gone before, and who have reached the haven where we long to be."

The children left soon after this conversation, and as they passed the old parish churchyard, they noticed, for the first time, that there was a red thorn tree growing near Edward Ansted's grave.

CHAPTER IV.

THE HEART'S-EASE.

MAY'S garden was looking very pretty, and the children were quite delighted with the flowers, they looked so gay and bright.

"I see that something wants doing to it," said Annie; "and if it were my garden, I should give orders to my gardener to do it."

"Oh, would you!" laughed May. "Well, I must walk round and see. Oh, those two great weeds! how ever did they grow up so quickly? I'm afraid you are a very careless gardener, Annie. You must take them up directly, and rake the whole garden over."

"That's just what I wanted," said Annie. "I do like raking so."

"Oh, how beautiful these heart's-ease are, Annie! Do look!"

"They are just ready for cutting. Who shall we take them to?"

"Couldn't we take them to old Mrs. Morris? She would be so pleased, and we could make them so pretty with some green," said Annie, throwing away her rake.

"No, I am going to cut them and do them up. You are the gardener."

"Oh, I was forgetting that you are the mistress. I beg your pardon, ma'am."

The garden was then left to be raked in the evening, and May and Annie went in to ask Mrs. Aston if they might go and see Mrs. Morris, and take her some flowers. She gave them leave, and so they started at once.

Mrs. Morris was a sweet-looking old woman, who lived in a pretty little cottage with her grandson. She had brought him up, and he was very fond of her and very kind to her; but, as he was out all day, she was rather lonely, and therefore pleased to have visitors, especially young people, for she said they almost made her feel young again. Her grandson used every bit of the garden for vegetables, so that the old lady had no room for flowers, except a few she kept in pots, and the pretty creepers on the house.

She was, therefore, very pleased to have a few to put on her table with her Bible and spectacles. May and Annie had taken her flowers before, but this was the first time they had taken them out of May's new garden.

"We have brought you some heart's-ease, Mrs. Morris," said May, as she entered the neat kitchen where Mrs. Morris was sitting.

"Some heart's-ease, my dears! Well, I'm sure you could bring me nothing better."

"Oh, Mrs. Morris," said Annie, "there are lots of things, and lots of flowers even, better than heart's-ease; but we are glad you like them, for they are out of May's new garden, and I do the work for her."

"Do you, my dear? Well, to be sure! You are not very old to do the work; but I daresay missy sees you don't do too much."

"No, Mrs. Morris, I don't think she will kill herself; but I want to know why you like heart's-ease better than other flowers."

"No, my dear, I didn't mean I liked heart's-ease better than other flowers; but heart's ease—that is, a peaceful, contented heart—is one of God's best gifts. And you said, 'I have brought you some heart's-ease,' and I said, 'You could bring me nothing better.'"

"Oh, I see," said May. "Well, I hope you will have heart's-ease in your heart, as well as on your table."

"Thank you, my dear; that is very pretty of you. It's a blessed thing to have peace within, and God's beautiful flowers outside; but when I was a girl I did not care much about either."

"Didn't you?" said Annie. "What were you like when you were young? Did you always wear that great white cap."

"No, my dear, that I didn't, though in those days, young girls did wear caps, real caps, when they went out to service and when they were married. Those were good old days, my dear, in many ways, though folks do think these times so grand."

"I wish you would tell us about those times," said May, "when you were a little girl."

"Wouldn't it be nice, Annie, if Mrs. Morris would tell us what she used to do?"

"Oh yes, it would; but might we get some peas first, and then we could shell them while you talk to us?" said Annie, turning to Mrs. Morris.

"Yes, dearie, you may get some peas from the second row at the other end of the garden; and you, missy, will get down that large brown basin, won't

you, dear? It's curious how fond one gets of one's chair, when one grows old. It seems so hard to move. Hey day! I used to be as active as anybody."

"Mamma says she will be very thankful if she is as well and strong as you are at eighty. I heard her say so to nurse one day."

"Well, my dear, I hope she will be much better than I am. Now, here comes little missy, with her frock full of peas. Oh dearie me! what will mamma say if that pretty frock is spoilt? Come here, my dear, and let me wipe it for you. Young ladies always wore pinnies when I was a girl. It's one of them new-fangled notions to go about and spoil your nice new frocks."

"Oh no," said May, "these are our garden frocks; we run about in these, and mamma doesn't mind."

"Oh well, 'garden frocks' are new-fangled too, so you are new-fangled anyhow, missy," said Mrs. Morris, with a twinkle in her eye. "Now, my dears, I must see if I can remember something about when I was a little girl. I've told you a good deal, and I shall get used up some of these fine days, and have no more to tell, and then I wonder if the little missies will and come and see the old woman."

"Oh, yes! you know we shall," said both children in a breath. "Why, we often go and see nurse, and she is too poorly to talk to us at all sometimes."

"Well, now, my dears, if you'll sit quiet for a bit, I'll tell you 'about when I was a little girl,' as Miss Annie calls it. When you brought them heart's-ease to me, it took me back seventy-one years. Just think on that. Why, missy, you think you will be getting old at twenty; don't you?"

"Oh yes. Why, I think I shall be very big at twelve. I can't fancy what twenty is like," said May.

"Can't you? Then you can't fancy what nearly four times twenty is; so I had better go on with my tale at once. You've heard me tell of Miss Lucy, sometimes, but I never told you how it was that I knew her so well, and that we were so fond of one another. It was in this way, my dears. She was what is called my foster-sister. My mother was her nurse, and brought her up from a little, such a little baby. Her mother at the Hall was very ill when she was born, and she had to go away soon after into foreign parts. So my mother took Miss Lucy home with her to nurse; and as Madam did not

return again till Miss Lucy was seven years old, we had a long time together, and we were just like sisters."

"How was it that Lucy's mamma was so long away?" said May.

"Because she was so very delicate, that the doctors wouldn't let her come to England."

"Please go on," said Annie, rather impatient about the interruption.

"I was mother's only child, so that when we heard that Madam was going to return to the Hall, and that she would want Miss Lucy back, we were both very sad. Mother was very fond of Madam—but then she was very fond of Miss Lucy, too—and she felt how lonely I should be without my playfellow; but she had always looked forward to this time. She knew she could not keep Miss Lucy always, for she was a lady born, and she must be brought up like one. She therefore made up her mind to part, and she tried to make me see that it was all for the best; but, dearie me, children, I was as sore about it as one of you would be if the other was going to be taken away to some grand place right out of sight. I screamed, and put myself into a dreadful passion when mother first told me of it; and when that had worked off I was dull and miserable whenever the dreadful thought came over me

that my dear dear Lucy must go away. Miss Lucy, too, could not bear the thoughts of parting, and she seemed quite frightened at the notion of the big house, and of all the brothers and sisters she would have to see."

"Where were all her brothers and sisters all this time, Mrs. Morris?" said Annie.

"Oh, the elder ones were with the Squire and Madam, and the younger ones were at school; but now all the family was coming home, so that Miss Lucy would have to make many new friends at once. Well do I remember the last day we had together, and our last walk. We went out into the fields, hand-in-hand, feeling very dull and listless. Then, after a little while, Miss Lucy began to try and comfort me, by telling me what beautiful things she would give me. She said I should have half of all her new toys, and that she would ask her mamma to let me come and see her, and that she might come and see me. Then she said, 'When we are grown up we will live in a pretty little house together all the rest of our lives.' I could not get the comfort out of this Miss Lucy seemed to do, for she was much more hopeful than I was; but still it pleased me that she was going to ask to come to see me, and so we began gathering our last nosegay of wild flowers. Now, mother often

made us each a wreath of the flowers we had gathered, and then she would tell us their names, and what they meant; for mother was a noticeable woman, and a very good scholar. That day we took home a good many wild violets and heart's-ease among the other flowers; and when we saw mother in the little parlour, we asked her to make us each a wreath to wear before we parted. Mother noticed my dull, sad face, and she made me a wreath of violets and heart's-ease. It all comes to me as if it was the other day. She said, 'This is for thee, my girl, and I hope thou wilt have a contented mind, for that is what heart's-ease means; and I hope thou wilt not forget to be as humble as these violets, which hang their heads so low.' Then, as she saw me nearly crying, she kissed me, and sent me to fetch the butter in, for she was going to have her dish of tea when we had our bread-and-milk. When I got back again, Miss Lucy had her wreath on, and I was just going to ask her what it meant, when we heard the sound of carriage-wheels, and soon we saw a grand coach drive up to the door. Mother ran upstairs to get her best cap, and we stood quite still, feeling that the time had come when we must part.

"Mother soon opened the door, and then a beauti-

ful lady came into the parlour, and after looking at us for a moment, she said, 'This must be my darling,' and she clasped Miss Lucy to her heart, and covered her with kisses.

"Oh, my dears, I cannot tell you what I felt, I could have torn her to pieces, I was so angry to think she was going to take away my dear dear Lucy and leave me quite alone. After she had talked to Miss Lucy, and to my mother about her, for some little time, she turned, and saw my angry, jealous eyes watching her. I think she instantly guessed my feelings, for she held out her hand to me, and said to mother, 'Is this your only one, nurse, and the foster-sister of my Lucy? Come here, dear,' she said to me; 'you would like to know Lucy's mother, and I want to know you.'

"Then mother took my hand, and led me to Madam, saying my heart was very sore at parting from Miss Lucy, and she had been telling me I ought to be humble and contented, or my wreath would not become me. I burst into tears at this, and said I could not part with Lucy. I would not say 'Miss Lucy,' as mother had told me I must, now that she was going to live at 'the Hall,' but I went on saying I could not let her go, it was wicked to take her away. Miss Lucy cried in company, and there was quite an upset.

Mother was so vexed, that she was going to take me out of the room, but Madam would not let her. She took my hands, and then lifted me on her knees, and after soothing me a little, she said, oh, so sweetly (she was such a sweet lady, my dears), 'Little Susie is not contented or happy. Is she, dear?'

"'No,' I said, with a sob, 'I love her,' and I pointed to Lucy, who was standing by with a little sad face.

"I remember now, though it's all these years since, seeing the tears start into Madam's eyes, and she said, 'Well, I will tell you what you shall do. You shall come to the Hall with Lucy, and stay with her for a while, and see how you like it. What do you say to that? Will you come?'

"I felt rather frightened, but without waiting a minute I said I would. I thought anything would be better than parting with Lucy. Mother said it was too great an honour, and it would not do, but I could see she was mighty pleased, and Madam would not hear a word against it. We were then both sent out of the room, and when we were called in again we were told we were both to go to the Hall in the morning. I was quite a different child after this, and Miss Lucy was as pleased as I was. Still I could not

help feeling afraid of all the grand people at the Hall, and I did not know whether I should behave properly, and I had all sorts of fears. But then Miss Lucy felt afraid too, for it was almost as bad for her as for me, except that mother had always talked to her about how she would have to behave, and what she would have to do when Madam came back. The next morning we both went to the Hall, and were received by Madam only, for the Squire was not coming for a few days. Madam was very kind, and kissed me, and of course Miss Lucy was covered with kisses, but I have chiefly got to tell you my own experience, so that I put myself first. Madam took us up to the schoolroom herself, where three little girls and one boy were having their lessons. I daresay you would like to know their names. Miss Amelia was the eldest, she was thirteen; then there was Miss Theresa, eleven; Miss Margaret, ten; and Master George, nine. They all rose when their mother entered, and they kissed Miss Lucy very warmly when she told them that she was their little sister. Then she explained who I was, and that I had come to stay with Miss Lucy, and she wished them to be kind to me. They all looked rather strangely at me, but when Madam told the young ladies to give me a kiss, they did so

immediately. Then, to my great relief, we were taken to the nursery, and I felt as if I could breathe again when I was alone with my dear Miss Lucy. We both felt very strange, and I think Miss Lucy was very glad to have a companion, and I know she was very glad to have me with her, for she loved me very dearly. We had a private talk about the young ladies, and we both agreed they were not very nice. I quite disliked them, and so I was quite pleased that Miss Lucy did not care for them. I got on pretty well the first day, for we had our meals alone with the nurse, and during the rest of the day we were a great deal with Madam. But the next day we had our dinner in the schoolroom with the young ladies, their governess, and Master George. I saw them titter round the table before we began, but soon there were roars of laughter, when I was caught putting my knife to my mouth. Poor Miss Lucy then came in for it, because she bit her bread. We both coloured, and felt very much confused; but Miss King, the governess, reproved their rudeness, and then she told us we must not put our knives to our mouths, and that we must break our bread.

"Now we knew we ought not to do either of these things, for mother had been nurse with Madam, and knew something about proper behaviour, and she had

told us not to do these things; but then every day we saw father do it, and even mother too, sometimes, so we had got into the way of following their example.

"You see, my dears, people are always more inclined to practise what you *do*, than what you *say*. I remember I did not eat half enough at dinner, for I felt so afraid of being laughed at again, and I often saw four pairs of merry eyes watching for what would come next. Then I made another slip in always calling the governess 'Miss.' I kept saying it at every sentence, and they were so amused, and said Miss King had never been so much 'missed' in her life."

"Didn't you and Lucy go to school," said Annie.

"I used to go sometimes, but Miss Lucy was too delicate. The doctors said she wasn't to get any learning until she was stronger. Besides, we shouldn't have learnt much about manners at my school. Miss Lucy would have had to go right away from mother, both for fine manners and good learning, but Madam thought most about her health.

"But though they made such fun, I don't want you to think they were quite unkind, my dears. No, in a grand patronizing sort of way they were often good to me; but, of course, it was not the place for such as me, and child as I was, I began to find it out more and

more. Madam's orders were that I was to be treated as Miss Lucy's companion and friend, but the servants and everybody knew I was only the gamekeeper's daughter, and they made me feel it, just as people in this world, my dears, know well enough how to make anybody uncomfortable. The Squire did not come home until I had been there a few days; but the day he returned, orders were sent up that we were all to go down and see him, and have some dessert.

"'Of course, Susan will not go down,' said Miss Amelia, haughtily; 'papa does not care to see her.'

"'Yes, miss,' said the nurse, 'the orders are that she is to go down with you.'

"'Really, it's very strange that mamma can allow that child to be with us,' said Miss Amelia.

"I heard all this, and I determined not to go down; but nurse would not hear of it; I was taken down and sent in with the rest, and oh, how awkward I felt! When the Squire had kissed them all, he turned to me, and said in his jolly sort of way—

"'Well, Susie, how do you like playing the lady? Come here, my lassie, let's have a look at ye?'

"'No, don't trouble her,' said Madam kindly, 'she is very shy. Go and sit by Lucy,' she said, turning such gentle eyes upon me and smiling sweetly.

"I was nearly crying with vexation and wounded pride, but Madam's kindness comforted me, and Miss Lucy was so good, putting her hand into mine, as she had been used to do at the cottage. There were many good things for dessert, but I was so afraid of making a mistake, and not eating them properly, that I wisely took only a piece of cake, and that I managed to get through without being laughed at, although to this day, I remember the great temptation I had to pick out the currants, as I did at home.

"Then another day, they had some friends come to see them; and there was a little girl about Miss Lucy's age, who took a great fancy to her, and wanted to be her friend. She was a pretty, taking child, and Miss Lucy was greatly taken with her; and although I know she did not wish to make me unhappy, she did wish to play with her new friend. So she brought me one of her new toys to comfort me; and then she went to play in another part of the room, as this child wanted to see her doll's house. She soon came back to me, and wanted me to come and play with them, but I was too jealous and angry to think of it. She coaxed and pleaded with me to come, and at last I went, but the game did not go off very well, and we all felt uncomfortable, and did not at all mind

when we were called to have our bread and milk, which we knew meant bed, for which we began to prepare as soon as the meal was over.

Miss Lucy got on much better than I did, although she really did not know much more; she was naturally a quick child, and she seemed to guess what it was right to do. She did not suffer from awkwardness in the way I did, and then she had so much love shown her, and her sisters gave her every help, often telling her privately what to do, but taking good care not to let me hear them.

"But the great trouble, which made me feel how thoroughly I was out of place, was this: Madam had invited many of the neighbouring gentry's children to a party, and I had a pretty frock made by nurse for it. I was very proud and vain of my finery, and I showed it. I gave myself such airs, shook myself about, and pretended to be so very grand, that the young ladies got quite angry; and when some of their friends asked who I was, they said I was only a vulgar child, whom their mother had asked to stay; but Master George went further still, and, without any more ado, said, 'She's only our gamekeeper's lass; she's got to look after Lucy, that's all. I heard nurse say so.'

"You may think, my dears, how they all stared; and when they did begin to play again, not one of them would have anything to do with me; even Miss Lucy seemed shy, and did not come to me in the sweet way she used to do. I felt very wretched, and, after trying to appear as if I did not care for a little while, I slipped out of the room, and down the stairs, and out of the door towards mother's cottage, for there I felt I should be welcome, and I longed to cry out all my troubles in her arms.

"Mother looked quite frightened when she saw me in my fine frock running in with angry tears streaming down my face. She was busy, but she quickly wiped her hands and took me on her lap, while she tried to get out of me what my trouble was.

"'Oh, mother, mother,' I said, 'I hate 'em all, I do; yes, and Lucy too. I'll never go again—no, never, mother! they're so proud and unkind;' and I went on sobbing, and here and there telling mother how it was I had run away.

"Father came in while mother was soothing me.

"'Well, what's up now?' he said, when he saw me. 'She be fine, to be sure! Well, Betsy, what's the upshot on't?'

"'Oh, she's run away,' said mother, with hot

cheeks; 'they've been unkind, and she's come home. I'm glad on't; I'll not have her set upon. I can't think how it is. I'm sure Madam don't know.'

"Then she told father what I had told her; and he was angry, too, and said he should speak to the Squire, for he knew he would not like it.

"However, Madam sent for mother up to the Hall, and told her the truth; but she said she had feared, from the first day, that her plan to break the separation to me had not been a good one. Still, she went on to say, it had perhaps effected her purpose to some extent, although she was very grieved that it had been done in such a manner. She told mother that she had taken pains to have me treated well, but she could not help other people showing their dislike to what she had done, and then my own conduct had led to the last unkindness. Mother quite agreed that it was best that I should keep at home with her; only she pleaded that we might see Miss Lucy sometimes at our cottage, and she hoped that Madam would still honour us with her friendship and favour.

"The dear lady never thought of withdrawing it. She said she wished us always to feel as sisters, and to be as sisters as much as our different positions

would allow; and she said she should never forget mother's kindness to Miss Lucy (no more she ever did); and she finished up with saying she should call to see me, and bring Miss Lucy with her.

"Mother came home, looking quite pleased and happy. She did not chide me then for not telling her that my own conduct had brought on the worst unkindness. She merely told me that Madam was very nice about me, and that she was coming to see me, and going to bring Miss Lucy with her. I didn't feel as if I wanted to see Miss Lucy. I felt as if I quite disliked everybody at the Hall. I only wanted to sit close by mother, and feel that I had one true friend in the world. Mother did not mind that I should want to be with her. She teased me about being mammy-sick all of a sudden, but she dearly loved it, I know. As for myself, I felt as if home was beautiful after the coldness and ridicule which I had endured at the Hall.

"The next day Madam arrived with Miss Lucy. Mother took me into the room with her; and when Miss Lucy saw me, she came shyly forward and kissed me. Her first kiss was very timid, but all of a sudden she flung her arms round my neck, and said, 'I do love you, Susie, very much, and I'm so sorry I

was not very kind the day you ran away.' I was quite taken with her again, and returned her kisses warmly. Then Madam told us to run away and play, for she should leave Miss Lucy for the rest of the day, and come for her in the evening. So we scampered off to the fields and woods, and forgot our troubles, and were just two happy butterflies again. It's curious how well I remember those days, my dears, and many and many a thing that's happened later on I've quite clean forgot. Well, we had a happy, merry day, and in the evening Madam came to fetch Miss Lucy home. She said she wanted to speak to me first, so I had to go in all alone to see her. I felt so frightened, for I thought she was going to scold me; but I soon found out I was mistaken, for she had such a sweet smile on her face, and she held out her hand and took me to her, and gave me a kiss. Then I saw she had some heart's-ease and violets in her hand, and she said to me—

"'Do you remember, Susie, that you had a wreath of violets and heart's-ease on when I first came, and that your mother had told you, if you wanted to be like your wreath, you must have a contented mind and a humble heart?'

"'Yes, ma'am,' I said, feeling very guilty.

"'Well,' she said, 'you can understand now that you are more happy here with your mother than anywhere else; and you will not lose your friend, for Miss Lucy will come to see you, and I think she will always remember her foster-sister, so that you must not fear that she will forget you. Now, I say all this because I want you to feel that God knows best, and it is his will that you are Susie Smith, and not Lucy's very own sister; and I want you to pray that you may have a contented mind and a new and humble heart, so that you may be like the Lord Jesus Christ, who loved you and bought you. Then when you wear a wreath of these pretty flowers, you may hope that you are like them.'

"Then she went on to say that she hoped I should bloom a beautiful flower one day in God's own garden; and though I did not quite understand her then, mother explained it all to me afterwards; and I often used to think of what she had said, and pray that I might be like the heart's-ease and violets, and that I might be one of God's own flowers. This was how it was, my dears, that your heart's-ease reminded me of what had happened so many years ago, and I have told you this long story as well as I remember it. Though I daresay I have not told it to you just as it

should be, still it's pretty near; for, as I said before, it's curious how well I remember those times when I was a child, long ago."

"But do tell us how you parted from Miss Lucy," said May, "and what became of her."

"Oh, we parted very good friends, and she often used to come and see me. I never went to the Hall again, except for an hour or so—I had had enough of that—not, at least, until Miss Lucy was grown up; then she married, and she wanted me to be her maid, so I went to pack up for her, and then we went to foreign parts, and we were travelling up and down, until Miss Lucy—I mean Lady Hamlyn, as she was then—until she died. But you must not ask me any more, my dears. I cannot talk of that, except just to tell you she died very happy, and I hope my time is not far off, but I'm willing to wait the Lord's time, for He knows best."

The children sat quite still for a minute, looking at Mrs. Morris, and then Annie said, "I can't fancy you a little girl, Mrs. Morris; you look as if you had always sat in that chair; it seems so funny to think you could run about."

"I daresay it does, my dear," said Mrs. Morris,

laughing, "but I did, I can assure you, and quite as quick as you do, I can tell you."

"Yes, I'm sure you would not tell a story," said Annie.

"We are very much obliged to you, Mrs. Morris," said May. "It has been a very pretty tale; perhaps you will tell us another, next time we come."

"Well, I shall see, my dear, whether I can think of one. You see, I shall get used up, as I told you before, and then I shall have nothing to say."

"Oh yes, you will! What shall we do with the peas, please?"

"You can put them on the shelf, and if you look in that blue basin, you will see some apples; you can each have two, and then I think you must go home, or mamma will be afraid you are lost."

CHAPTER V.

THE BLUE-BELLS.

Mrs. Aston called the children to her one day, and said that she was going up to London for a fortnight, and so she had asked nurse to come and stay with them while she was away. She said she hoped they would be very good and obedient, and as they would not have any lessons, she wished them to be out in the open air as much as possible.

"Oh, that is nice!" said Annie, giving a few jumps; "not that you are going away, mamma dear, but that we shall have no lessons, and that we are to be out in the air. Isn't it beautiful, May?"

"Y-e-s," said May, "I shall like the holiday, but do you think you will come back safely, mamma?"

"I hope so, my child. At all events, I shall be quite as safe as if I were at home."

"Yes, mamma, but it does not seem as safe to be going in the train as it is to be at home."

"My May must learn to trust," said Mrs. Aston, kissing her. "Don't you remember the verse you learnt the other night, 'He shall not suffer thy foot to be moved; He that keepeth thee will not slumber?'"

"Yes, mamma, I will trust you away, and I shall be very pleased to have nurse here. I felt afraid, because of that railway accident papa was talking about."

Mrs. Aston left the day after this conversation, and nurse came.

There was a great talk as to what was to be done while mamma was away; various plans were thought of. May's garden, of course, was to be put into the most perfect order; so she called the little gardener, who was playing in an undignified way with the kitten, and suggested that the weeds should be taken up and the whole garden neatly raked.

Annie immediately undertook the work, while May looked to see what flowers she could spare for giving away.

Nurse came up while the children were busy, and when she found that May was counting her treasures, she told her of a poor child in the town, who, she thought, would be very glad to be visited and to have some flowers.

"Oh yes, I shall like to take her some," said May. "In what street does she live? and what is the matter with her?"

"She lives in Friar Street, and has such a poor home. She has a spinal complaint, and is always obliged to lie down, but she is so sweet and patient, and so industrious when she is feeling a little better."

"Poor thing!" said Annie, who had stopped to listen. "Has she a mother, and father, and brothers, and sisters, nursey?"

"No, darling, not so many relations as that. She has a widowed mother, and a little brother called Bill, that is all. She is so fond of her mother, and so kind to her little brother, and he is such a tiresome child, too."

"Oh, it would be nice to go and see her, wouldn't it, Annie? When shall we go, nurse?"

"You had better wait for a few days, for she was very poorly when I saw her last, and it takes a little while for the attacks to wear off."

"Suppose we go on Friday," said May.

"Very well, I will take you, and then I shall leave you to stay and talk to her while I go and do some shopping. Now I should like to see what you will take her."

"There is a tiny rosebud on that tree," said May, "but it is only a monthly rose; then there is still some red thorn left."

"Oh, you must not take that, dear," said nurse, "it would give too strong a scent. What else have you? Oh, this is very pretty! Why, it is a blue-bell, that would be very nice."

"Yes," said May, "and I see a few other things that will be out by Friday, so with some pretty green, it would look nice. We shall soon have our standard roses out, and the geraniums too, and then the garden will look pretty. Won't it, nurse?"

"Yes, it will indeed."

When Friday came, the children made up a pretty nosegay, chiefly of blue-bells, monthly roses, and pretty pieces of green, and they started with nurse for the street in which the sick child lived.

"Wasn't it a good thing we kept our blue-bells, nursey?" said Annie. "I am so glad we did not throw them away, or May could not have made such a pretty nosegay."

"It was a very good thing you kept it, dear; you see 'no waste, no want,' is true of flowers as well as food."

"It's nicer about flowers than food," said Annie, "because I don't like eating up my fat, nor my crusts

when the jam is all gone; and flowers haven't to be eaten up—you just water them and they keep all right until they die."

They were not long in reaching Friar Street, and then the children felt rather shy when they really came to the house.

Mrs. Martin, the mother of the sick child, only rented two rooms, and into the first nurse took the children.

"I've brought the young ladies to see Naomi," said nurse, "and they've brought her some flowers, for I told them how fond she was of them."

"I'm very much obliged, I'm sure. Sit down, please. I'll go and tell her you've come; she's been a-looking out every day since you said you'd tell the young ladies about her."

"Oh, nurse, what shall we say?" said May, getting alarmed. "I can't think of anything."

"Oh, don't trouble about that, missy, say you've brought her some flowers, and that you're very sorry she's ill."

"And what am I to say, nursey?" said Annie. "Please tell me something too."

"You can say the same, and you can tell her about your rabbits."

"Oh yes, so I can," said Annie, brightening up; and then Mrs. Martin came in and said that Naomi was quite ready for the young ladies. Nurse took them in; but as the room was darkened they could not see well at first; then, as they looked more closely, they saw a very pale, thin girl, lying on her back on a small wooden bedstead. May went up to her, and gave her the flowers, saying she was very sorry she was so ill; then Annie said the same; and after nurse had spoken, she thought they would get on better alone, so she left them.

Naomi lay quite still for a few minutes looking at the flowers, turning them round and round and smelling them; then she said—

"I do like flowers. Would you put them in water for me, miss? I be so much obliged to you for them."

May asked what she should put them in. And Naomi pointed to an old mug, which May filled half full of water, and then put in the flowers.

"Please, both on you, sit down," said Naomi, "if you don't mind staying a bit."

"Oh no," said May, "we've come to stay while nurse does her shopping."

"That's kind," said Naomi. "Might I ask how old the little 'un is?"

BLUE-BELL.

Annie nearly burst out laughing, but May managed to get out that she was seven years old.

"Thank ye, and how old be you?"

"I am nine," said May. "How old are you?"

"Eleven, miss; I was just as old as you are when I fell down stairs and hurt myself so bad, and I've lain here ever since."

"How tired you must be," said May.

"Well, I gets very tired sometimes when I am much by myself. Sometimes mother goes out charing, and then she just gets a neighbour to come in now and agen, and it do seem a long time, and lonely like; but I'm that fond of flowers that when I get them, they seem to make a bit of company."

"I'm so glad we brought you some," said May. "We will bring you some more. We shall be having some beautiful roses out soon; but my garden has not a great many flowers in it, and so I could not gather you very nice ones to-day."

"Oh, these be beautiful!" said Naomi. "Then the garden isn't little missy's too?"

"No," said Annie, "it is May's garden, and I am her gardener. I keep rabbits instead; I have such beauties."

"Have you, miss? I had a rabbit when I was

well, but after I was took ill, mother said she hadn't time to see to it, so she sold it, and bought me that there little book with the money. It's such a pretty tale, I read it over and over."

"Do you like reading?" said May.

"That I do; I should be dull if it wasn't for reading when I'm a bit better. I used to have such a nice teacher to come and see me, but she's left, and now I've no one. I used to go to the Sunday-school one time, and it was just after the treat that I fell and hurt myself. It was the only whole day I was ever in the country, and it *was* nice. I could almost cry when I look at them blue-bells, for I got such a lot of them that day!"

"Where did you go for the treat?" said May.

"We went to the fields near Bexley Woods. Bill and I both went, and my friend, Betsy Green, from t'other side of the street. We went in great vans, and a teacher went in each van with the scholars. My teacher sat next me, and told me such a pretty tale when the others didn't make too much noise."

Mrs. Martin came in just as Naomi finished this sentence, to say that nurse had come back again, as she was afraid there was a storm coming on, and she wanted the young ladies to get home. At first Naomi

looked so disappointed, that May said she would ask nurse to let them come on Monday to see her again, and then they would bring some more flowers, particularly blue-bells.

Naomi quite brightened up at this and said, "It would be nice if it wasn't troubling."

"Oh no," said May, "we shall like it."

Annie asked if she might bring one of her baby rabbits?

"Just hear her!" said Mrs. Martin, laughing; "o' course you may if you'll take it home again, but my poor lass ain't well enough to look after it."

Annie said she would take it back, and then after saying "Good-bye," the children went, and Naomi was left alone.

Oh, who can tell the longing, yearning desire that came over the poor girl for green fields and country life! She had just spent one whole day in the country two years ago, and she had never forgotten it. It had been to her a heavenly pleasure; the beautiful flowers, the birds, the trees, and streams, had quite entranced her, and now she seemed cut off from all these delights.

The tears came into her eyes and dropped quietly down, and then there came into her mind a text her

teacher had taught her, "There are pleasures at thy right hand for evermore;" and as she thought of the joys prepared for those who love God, a calm came over her, and she was soon sleeping a quiet happy sleep.

May and Annie were very full of their new friend. They felt how sad it was to be lying there without being able to get up and run about, and then she had so few comforts too. So various little things were thought of to make their visit on Monday a happy surprise.

Cook was to make some jelly, and the children denied themselves their Sunday cake at tea, in order that it might be taken uncut to Naomi. Then May had knitted herself a little shawl, to wear when the days were too cool for the garden frock alone, and this she asked nurse's leave to present, as she had something else (not nearly so pretty though) that she could wear. Nurse consented, feeling that it was really a self-denial on May's part to give it, as it was the first large piece of knitting she had done.

Annie chose one of her books to give; she told nurse it was the "most grown up one" she could find. In fact, nurse had to forbid anything more being taken this time. She reminded them that they would

pay other visits, and that there were other poor girls and boys who wanted help.

How pleased the children were when Monday came at last! It was so delightful to think of the pleasure they hoped to give, and they both longed to make poor Naomi's life brighter. Mrs. Martin was out when they reached the house, but they got the key from a neighbour, and nurse took the children in.

Naomi was delighted to see them, and as one by one the gifts were shown her, she seemed almost overwhelmed. But nurse began talking about other things, and made May arrange the fresh nosegay of blue-bells and roses, so that Naomi had time to recover herself.

Annie proposed that she should have some of the jelly at once; this was considered a very good idea, so a plate and spoon were procured, and Naomi seemed quite refreshed after she had taken some. Annie's baby rabbit was very much admired; it seemed so funny to see him on the bed; he gave such odd jumps, and once he came right down upon the jelly! Nurse thought that both the children would be too much for Naomi, so she proposed that Annie should come with her while she went to do some errands, and that May should stay quietly with Naomi.

Annie was quite willing to go, now that she had given her present, shown her rabbit, and seen Naomi; for to tell the truth, it was very hard work for her to sit still for long, and she could not run about in Naomi's room.

As soon as the two girls were left alone, Naomi said, "I've had such a happy time since you were here. I should so like to tell you about it, if you don't mind."

"Oh no; I should like it," said May. "Please do tell me."

"Well, you remember that you put them blue-bells and roses in the mug on the washstand, and they were just where I could see 'em as I lay here."

"Yes," answered May.

"After you were gone, I felt a bit tired, just nicely, not much you know, and I went to sleep and dreamt; oh, such a pretty dream! I've been thinking it over and over, so that I could tell it to you just as it happened."

"I should so like to hear it," said May. What was it about?"

"Well, I dreamt about that day I told you we had in the country two years ago. I thought we were all as busy as bees, picking blue-bells and primroses; there

were such a lot of us, and I could hear all the talking and laughing quite plain. It seemed just like real, all of it. At first there was a great noise, but after a bit there didn't seem so many of us, and I began walking away to another part, where there were more blue-bells, though I'd such a lot then, that I had to carry them in my pinny. As soon as I got to them, I began picking more, and then I wandered on and on, till I found I was all alone; but I didn't seem to mind, on I went, and the sun shone and the grass looked so green, and the birds sang—oh so beautiful it was! I felt so happy, and it seemed so wonderful like to feel so glad. I couldn't help thinking how queer it was; but still though it was queer, it was that nice, I couldn't tell you how beautiful it was.

"After a good while, the sun seemed going down, and it soon began to get dark, but I felt as if I must go on; and such a queer dreadful kind of feeling came over me, as if there was nothing but mist and darkness, and yet I must go through it. So I went on and on, and at last I saw a star come out, then another and another, till there were getting quite a many, and the mist and darkness seemed going, and I didn't seem in it any longer, but on my bed; and then all the stars seemed to join together, like a crown, and

to come into the room, and when I opened my eyes in astonishment, there were your blue-bells, with the moon shining full upon them, and somehow the stars and blue-bells all seemed mixed up together, and I thought that blue-bells must be stars, and stars blue-bells."

"How very strange!" said May.

"Yes, wasn't it? and I can't tell you how happy I felt, just as if all the dull unhappy time had gone, and as if I was going always to be glad. I shall always think now that blue-bells are stars, and that they make a crown, and it will make me think of that crown 'that fadeth not away,' that teacher used to tell me of.

"I felt so happy that I lay quite still for a bit, and then I called mother, for I began to feel so hungry I didn't know what to do. Then she comes and tells me I'd been sleeping ever since she'd been in, and when I awoke it was quite dark, and one o'clock in the morning. Mother was so pleased, for I hadn't had such a beautiful sleep for I don't know how long before—not since I'd had the fall."

"I'm so glad," said May. "Do you think the blue-bells made you sleep?"

"Well, I don't know as it was them alone, I felt so glad like, to think I'd got some friends again, and that you was a-coming to-day, and then I was mighty pleased with them blue-bells too, they looked so pretty, and made me think of the country. It was all of it together, mother thought, and so do I."

"I wish you could go out," said May, "I should think you could in a carriage, or something you could lie down in."

"The doctor says I'm not to move for another year; he told mother that after that I might be able to be got out, but not before. I shouldn't mind so much if you could come pretty often, but it's rude of me to ask it."

"Oh no, I should like to come," said May, "and it would be so nice for you to see mamma when she comes back, she is so kind."

"I wonder if she's like my teacher. She was a real lady too, only she wasn't old."

"Oh, mamma isn't old—not very old I mean. She hasn't got grey hair yet, and she doesn't wear a cap, like aunt. She's not really old because she can run. Now, Mrs. Morris, an old woman we know, can't run upstairs."

"Oh no, she's not old then; why, mother says she's not, though she tells folks, 'she's not young.'"

Nurse and Annie now came in to fetch May. Nurse was afraid Naomi was tired, but she said she was not. She seemed so sorry that May was obliged to go, that nurse said she should come again soon.

So after Mrs. Aston's return, May was very anxious to go and see Naomi again, and to interest her mamma in her case; and Mrs. Aston was quite pleased to see her little daughter show so much feeling, and take such a deep interest in the poor sick child.

She therefore allowed May to visit her again very soon, and gave her some beautiful fruit to take, and promised to go and see her in a few days. Annie thought she should like to go too, so Emma took the children, who were both delighted at the thoughts of the pleasure they were going to give Naomi.

As soon as they had asked her how she was, May put the basket of fruit on the table, near the bed, and Naomi seemed as if she couldn't believe her eyes.

"Them's not for me, surely?" she said, looking eagerly at May.

"Yes, they are," said Annie laughing, not able to contain herself, and wishing to be the first to communicate the good news.

"Ay, surely, but they're too good for such as me," said Naomi, as tears of pleasure and excitement came into her eyes.

"No, mamma hopes you will enjoy them very much, and she is coming to see you herself in a few days," said May.

"She is a kind lady! it just seems as if everything nice was coming to-day, for I've heard from my teacher, such a long letter, and I want you to read it, please, miss. Mother has been reading it, but she's not a very good scholar, and she can't make out all the hard words."

May sat down and took the letter, feeling very grand in being considered such a much better scholar than Naomi's mother.

Naomi had raised herself a little, so that she could watch May better while she read, and so get the whole effect of the valued letter. May began:—

"Dear Naomi,—I trust you are feeling better and stronger than when I left you. I have very

often prayed for you, and asked God to make you well again; and we know, dear child, that He can and will do this if it is best.

"I am afraid you must have thought I had forgotten you, but indeed I have not. I have very often thought of you, and wished I could see you again, but this cannot be just yet, though I hope it will not be a very long time before we meet. You will be very much surprised at something I am going to tell you. Can you guess? Try, before you read any more. When you send me a letter, which I hope you will do through your mother, you must tell me if you guessed rightly. The secret is this, I am married; so that I am no longer Miss Mackenzie, but Mrs. Bogue. Can you fancy me? I assure you I am just the same person, just as fond of Naomi, and as much interested in her as I was at dear Woodchester.

"I daresay you would like to know who my husband is, so I will tell you; he is a chaplain to a regiment of soldiers, that is, he reads prayers and preaches to them on Sunday, and looks after them during the week, as a clergyman looks after his people in England.

"Now I think you would feel interested if I told you something about India, and something about a

school there is near us, where many native children are taught about the Bible, and learn to grow up useful men and women. First, then, about India. It is a very hot country, so hot, that we have to have great fans, called Punkahs, in the rooms to keep up a current of air, so that we have to live in a wind. The sun has such power as soon as ever it rises, that it would be dangerous to be out without some protection, even when it only seems to have just risen. It is impossible to do anything in the middle of the day but sleep, or keep quite still, so that we have to get up very early indeed, so as to secure the cooler hours for work. We are obliged to have a great many servants, because they will only each do one thing. Fancy people in England having one servant to clean the boots, another to make the beds, another to brush your clothes, and so on.

"Then I am sure you would be dreadfully frightened if you saw one of the deadly serpents here, called cobras. They get into the houses sometimes, and I know one gentleman who told me what a narrow escape he had. He said he was in his bedroom, and he saw something hanging over the door, and at first he did not think of what it was, but soon he saw that it was a cobra just getting ready to

dart at him; you may think he quickly called his servant, who gave it a great blow which disabled it, and then it was quickly killed. Then the servants thought it was such a wonderful escape that they offered a sacrifice to their gods. I am afraid we do not always remember to praise our true God when we are delivered from danger, as these poor heathen praised and thanked their false gods.

"And now for the school where these poor heathen children are taught. I shall only tell you something about the girls, or my letter will be so long that you will forget the beginning before you reach the end. There are thirty girls in the school; from little tiny things of two and three, to thirteen and fourteen, and even older than this. But I must tell you that girls of thirteen and fourteen are treated as women in India, and fourteen is considered quite old to be married. Doesn't it seem funny? Fancy your friend Betsy Green being old enough to be married when she is only twelve!

"There is one child whom I have adopted, and who is called 'Naomi.' Can you guess who she is named after? But though she is named after a Sunday scholar of mine, she does not take her place in my heart. Still, it is pleasant to think I have a 'Naomi'

near me, and I sometimes look at her dusky face, and try to imagine a likeness to an English girl of the same name!

"Well, Naomi the dusky is actually going to be married, and she has been betrothed some months. She is going to marry a catechist, who is a very good young man. She is also, I trust, a true Christian, but is inexperienced and too young for the position she will occupy. She has a sister who is blind, and who is not yet a Christian. It is very sad to see her, and she is not at all happy, for she lives with an aunt who is not kind to her. She sometimes comes to see Naomi, who tried to teach her about God. She always listens very attentively, and we hope that what she hears may be blest to her, but she will find it hard work to profess the faith, for her aunt is very much opposed to Christianity.

"You ought to be very thankful that you have no one to keep you back from striving to follow the Saviour. Just think how trying it is for this young girl (she is only ten) to even think about the effort of becoming a Christian. I hope you will pray for her, dear Naomi.

"Now I have written you quite a long letter, and I shall expect one in return. I enclose you stamps for the postage, so that you will have no excuse.

Please remember me very kindly to your mother, and believe me to remain with love, Your affectionate teacher. "HELEN BOGUE.

"P.S. Since I finished my letter to you, I have heard that the poor blind child I told you about has been so cruelly treated by her aunt, that she has run away to the school for protection, and as she is very much hurt, the magistrate has been applied to, and he has given Miss Warner, the governess, power to keep her. It seems the woman with whom she lived was not really her aunt, and she has no parents. I hear she wants to be a Christian; if she becomes one, I will tell you about it in my next letter. Good-bye, once more, dear child."

"Isn't it a nice letter?" said Naomi, with tears in her eyes; "and I was afraid she had forgotten me quite."

"It is a very kind letter, and to think it has come all the way from India, miles and miles off!"

"Yes, all across the sea, isn't it, miss?"

"It has to come over some sea; but one day, when mamma was giving us our geography lesson, she told us that people, and letters, too, I suppose, came over the land a great deal, because if you go

a particular way, you can get there without much sea."

"I do hope that blind girl will come over to our religion. Don't you, miss? I shall pray for her as teacher asked me. Will ycu?"

"Yes, I will."

"So will I," said Annie. "I'm glad I'm not a heathen."

"There's Emma calling us," said May, "we must go."

"Oh, I'm so sorry," said Naomi, "but mother will be in soon, so never mind."

"I'm afraid we can't stay," said May, "but mamma is coming to see you in a few days."

"Then would she write for me to teacher?"

"Yes, I think she would. I'll ask her," said May.

The children then said "good-bye" to the sick child, who watched them out of the room with yearning eyes, and then she hugged her letter to her, feeling *that* could not go away.

Mrs. Aston came to see her in a day or two, and wrote the letter, as Naomi said, "right beautiful," and when it was fairly off, she began to wonder how soon she should get an answer. The children often came to see her, bringing her flowers and little delicacies;

and after a time she began to get quite well and strong again. But she never forgot the lessons she had learnt on her sick bed, and she often thanked God for the hours of darkness and weariness, for she felt they had been the means of drawing her nearer to Him.

CHAPTER VI.

THE ROSE.

"I CAN'T bear that old man! He is so ugly, and so cross and disagreeable, I'm sure nobody could like him if they tried ever so much," said Annie to May one day, after they had passed the Alms-houses in a street near their home.

"I suppose we ought to love him," said May.

"Love him!" screamed Annie, in perfect horror. "You might as well love a tiger! He looked as if he could eat me up just now, as we passed."

"He does look cross, and no mistake; but I wonder whether anything would make him kind? Suppose we give him a rose for his coat? He couldn't eat us up, however cross he might be."

"Don't ask me!" said Annie. "I'd as soon hand a rose to a roaring lion as to that cross old fellow. Do it yourself, if you like, and I'll peep round the

corner with Emma; and if he knocks you down, we'll come and pick you up."

"Thank you!" said May. "I'm sure you're very kind. Oh, never mind him. We'll give one to some one else."

"There!" said Annie. "You say, 'Never mind him,' when you think you will have to give it yourself."

"You are so sharp, Annie. I didn't think you'd mind it as much as I should."

"Just as if I like being knocked down any more than you do," said Annie, laughing.

But, however, the next day, before they went for their afternoon walk, May saw that Annie had got one of her very best roses in her hand.

"Whatever have you got that for?" said May, not quite liking Annie having gathered it without her permission.

"Don't look cross. I'm going to have a try at the old man. I thought we could run down the street in front of Emma, and then I could offer it to him quickly as I passed."

"But suppose he's not at his door?"

"Then I shan't go in. But he is there generally at this time."

ROSE.

So, with beating hearts, the children started with Emma; and, as they neared the Alms-houses, Annie's heart almost failed her when she saw the old soldier at his door. But she didn't want to be baffled, and so she tried to feel as courageous as possible.

The children began running, and, as they reached the old man, they slackened their pace, and Annie smilingly offered the rose.

To the surprise of the children—for May lingered to see the result—the rose was received quite graciously, with a sort of grunt, but also with an unmistakable smile.

"Thank you, missy," he said. "Is it for the button-hole?"

"Yes; or to put on your little table while you have your tea."

"Well, I never 'eard the loike!" said the old man, with a series of low grunts which were meant for laughter. "Th' old chaps would laugh to see me with a rose on th' table. I shouldn't mind th' mantelshelf."

"Oh! please put it where you like," said Annie, looking very sedate, but feeling very merry.

"Ay, ay; that's the place, missy. There it is. I'll just get a drop o' water to 'er. Now she do look

fine," he said, turning to the children, who had ventured almost within the lion's den.

"Yes, it's a beautiful rose," said May. "I hope it will live a long time."

"Ay, ay," said Old Peter (for that was the name he went by); "it 'll live fast enough. But you'd better come and see that I takes care on 'er."

"Yes, we will," said Annie, venturing a few steps into the room. "What a nice, clean little room you've got," she said, timidly, almost afraid whether the old lion would not turn upon her.

But, no; he gave a comical look as he saw her frightened peep at him, and said—

"It's a beautiful parlour, missy, and it 'll be proud to see you. Just try my chair. There, ain't it comfortable?"

Annie found herself actually sitting in Old Peter's chair!

It certainly *was* very comfortable, and she leant back her head, and shut her eyes, as if she was going to have a nap.

Old Peter watched her with a face full of the most intense amusement, and with such tenderness, that no one would have thought of calling him anything but the best-tempered man they knew.

Annie quickly opened her eyes. She had certainly no intention of sleeping in the den; and, as she looked up to the old man, she saw his face perfectly beaming upon her.

"I like your chair. It is very comfortable," she said, smiling.

"You's welcome, and I'll be glad to see you at any time. I'm fond of little folks, in my way."

By this time, Emma was quite tired of waiting; so she appeared at the door, and told the children they must come.

Old Peter's face changed as soon as he saw her, and the old gloomy look came back again; but he smiled to the children as they bade him good-bye; and, as Annie turned to have a last peep, she saw him sitting down in his chair with evident satisfaction, and the rose was in his hand.

"I like him so much," said Annie. "Don't you, May?"

"Yes; I think he must be kind, really, in his heart."

"He didn't look kind at me, that's certain," said Emma: "and I don't think your mamma would like you to go a-visiting of such as he."

"Oh yes; I'm sure mamma would," said Annie.

"She likes us going to see poor people. Besides, he only looked cross at you; he was very good to us, wasn't he, May?"

"Yes, he was; but I think he could soon get cross, if we did anything he didn't like."

"I should like to go and see him again on Wednesday," said Annie.

When they reached home, they told Mrs. Aston about their visit, and she was quite pleased to think they had made acquaintance with the old soldier; and she was willing that they should go and see him again soon.

So, when Wednesday came, May and Annie ran off, and went to pay a second visit to their new friend.

This time they went alone, as the Alms-houses were very near home, and they had told their mamma that Old Peter did not seem to like Emma. To their dismay, his door was shut, and they almost felt afraid to knock; but after looking at it for some time, as if they thought two pairs of eyes staring hard could open it, Annie ventured to give a timid knock.

There was a dreadful growl, and the door was flung open in an angry way; but, as soon as Old Peter saw who his visitors were, his face relaxed into a smile, and he seemed quite another man.

Nevertheless, he peered out to see if the objectionable Emma was there; but, when he saw the children were quite alone, he rubbed his hands in high glee.

"There, now; that's what I calls civility, to come and see me without that great gawky crittur with you. Now, missy," he said, turning to May, "take that cheer; and you, little un, take this un. 'Twas the same as my Sarah Anne allers sat in, and she were fond on't."

"Who was Sarah Anne?" said Annie.

"My darter, as died th' year I got this 'ere place. On course she died, 'cause I wanted her particular; and I wur that fond on 'er, it cut me in two, as you may say, when she went. Howsoever, tain't no good a-thinking on't."

"Was she grown up?" said May.

"No, no—grown up, missy! Why, she wur no bigger than th' little un there — beg pardon, little missy, I means. She were properly my grand-darter, but she allers seemed like my own, and of course she went. Everything and everybody as I likes goes to Ameriky, or dies, or gets killed, or summat. It's enough to try anybody's temper, and it's allers been that way with me. Like a comrade, he's killed; like

another, he must get away somewhere or other, not near me. It's all the same—allers has been, and allers will be. Little folks is best, that's why I likes you."

"I am so sorry you lose everybody," said May. "I don't know what I should do if I did. Yes, though —I think I should do something." Then May stopped, colouring, for she didn't like to bring it out.

"What would you do, then, missy? You look very wise."

May coloured more and more, and then she said, in a low voice, "Mamma says we ought to pray when we are in trouble."

Old Peter made no answer; but as there was a knock at the door, he hobbled there very quickly and opened it. There was a woman there with a basket of pins and needles, tapes and cotton, and she asked Old Peter to buy.

"No!" he roared. "Get you gone! Who wants such as you, a-selling and a-messing with your bits o' things? No, I say, can't you 'ear!" and he slammed the door in her face.

Both May and Annie looked shocked and uncomfortable, particularly as the old man went rating on to himself. He seemed quite upset, and May's only thought was, how they could get away.

But as soon as he saw May was getting up, he said, "What! are you a-going so soon? Can't you stay and keep an old man company a bit? I ain't out with you; but people as comes a-bothering, a-pushing, and a-screeching, provokes me that bad, if I'd only both my legs I'd kick 'em to t'other end of the street."

Annie burst out laughing, though May looked quite shocked. Old Peter laughed too.

"Wouldn't it be fun, little missy, eh? You'd like to see me do it, eh?"

"No, indeed, I shouldn't," said Annie; "I should be so frightened of you! I don't like you when you're cross."

"You're a queer un, and no mistake! Wull, I ain't angered with you—I likes your coming, and I wish you'd come often, and I'll not blow up th' old women. 'Ere's some gingerbread, now, right good. I wish you'd both on you have a bit."

Annie couldn't refuse, it looked so very nice; and May ventured on a piece, though she longed to get away, and thought she'd never come again. As they were eating it, the old man said, "I've lots and lots I could tell you about th' wars I've been in: such tales as you would like, I know. If you'll come in on an arternoon now and agen, I'll tell you lots. What

do you say to that, missy?" he said, turning to Annie.

"Oh, I should like it very much, if mamma would let us come," said Annie.

"Tell 'er it'll be a charity," said Old Peter—"a raal one, too. I'm not as rough as I look. I only gets out o' sorts now and agen; folks do bother me so a-coming and a-coming for ever to th' door."

"But we must come to the door, too," said May, looking amused.

"Yes, yes; but I'll know your knock now. You needn't fear, and I'll get the beautifullest story for you next time. When 'll you come again?"

May felt mollified; nevertheless, she wasn't quite prepared to say when they would come again, but Annie saved her the trouble, for she said, "Saturday is a whole holiday, so we will ask mamma if we may come in the afternoon for a bit; but you won't be cross, will you?" she said, coaxingly.

"No, no; certain not, little missy. You are that like my Sarah Anne, I never see'd the like on't."

"Will you tell us more about Sarah Anne," said May, "when we come on Saturday? I should like that better than the wars."

"Oh, May!" said Annie, looking very much dis-

appointed, "I shouldn't; not but what I should like to hear about Sarah Anne," she said, afraid the old man might think her unkind; "but I do want to hear about the battles, and the soldiers, and everything."

"Well, well, I'll please you both. You shall hear about my poor Sarah Anne, and I'll tell you lots about the wars, where I lost my leg."

The children thanked him and left, longing to get home and tell their mamma their wonderful experience.

"Oh mamma," said Annie, rushing into the room, "Old Peter has been so cross, not with us, but with a woman who came round selling things; he did go on so, and then, when he found we didn't like it, he made out he wouldn't be so cross to us, but he says everything has gone against him, and he has lost his grandchild, Sarah Anne, and he seems to have been so fond of her."

"Poor old man!" said Mrs. Aston, "his troubles have tried his temper instead of leading him to God; but perhaps we may be able to comfort him a little."

"We said we would go on Saturday afternoon if you would let us, mamma," said May, "he is going to tell about Sarah Anne, and about his battles."

"Yes, I do wish Herbert was here," said Annie,

"because he says he is going to be a soldier, and he would be so interested to hear about real battles."

"Well, dear, your cousins are coming for part of their holidays most likely, and then you will be able to take Herbert to see Old Peter."

"Oh, that will be delightful," said Annie, frisking round and round her mamma, "I shall tell Old Peter he must teach Herbert how to be a soldier."

"He would not find it easy without a leg, my dear."

"But he could tell him what to do, mamma, and that would be something."

On the Saturday, the children paid their promised visit to Old Peter, who had his door open all ready to receive them. His room was beautifully clean, and both the roses were carefully put in a tumbler on the mantel shelf. There was a plate of ginger-bread on the table, and some plates and tumblers.

"How do you do, little missies," he said, with beaming eyes (but with a face like a piece of leather drawn into thick folds for smiles), I'm pleased to see you, and I've got some ginger-bread and ginger-beer to match, you know) for you to keep yourselves awake (while I tell my stories."

"How kind of you!" said May, seating herself sedately in the chair prepared for her.

Annie looked brimful of happiness. "Do you know," she said, "I have a cousin who wants to be a soldier, and he is coming here for part of his holidays, and I want you to teach him, please, will you?"

"Well, I'll talk to him, but it will not be much good if he's no bigger than you, little missy."

"Oh yes, it will, for he'll be a man some day, and he's quite made up his mind to be a soldier."

Old Peter roared with laughter. "What do you think I made up my mind to be when I were seven, missy?"

"I don't know," said Annie, "what was it?"

"A cobbler! that's what I thought was one of the best trades going, to mend up lots of boots and shoes seemed fine to me, but 'ere's me, with a leg took off, and been a-soldiering all my life."

"But Herbert doesn't want to be a cobbler," said Annie, puzzled to see the drift of the old man's talk.

"No, but he wants to be a soldier at seven, and I wanted to be a cobbler at seven, and he may be no more a soldier than I've been a cobbler, eh, missy?"

"I don't think he'll change his mind," said Annie,

"we play at nothing else but soldiers when he's here, he's the officer and I'm the men."

"It's as good as a play, it is," said Old Peter laughing; "but howsoever, if we're to have tales about the war, I think we'd better have some of this 'ere ginger-bread and ginger-beer. What do you say, missy?" he said, turning to May.

"It would be very nice," said May. So Old Peter handed round the ginger-bread and opened some ginger-beer, but when it came to the point, he did not wish to be fortified himself with the same refreshments. He said, on being pressed by his young lady visitors, that he thought a glass of beer without the ginger would suit him better when the stories were over.

"Not as I takes more than my couple of pints a day ever, and only that when I's got extra duty, you know. I's not a drinking chap, never was, and hope I never will be; howsoever, talking do make a fellow dry, special when talking ain't one's trade. Now, if I'd been one of them preaching chaps, I'd a-talked and a-talked and never given in till as I could talk no longer, and no extra beer would I ha' took for that, but it's different when it ain't your trade, and talking's only occasional."

May managed to keep a grave face during this long

speech, but only by turning her back as much as possible on Annie, and eating small bits of gingerbread very quickly, so as to keep down her inclination to laugh; but Annie, after repeated little bursts, which she managed to smother down for a time, at last fairly choked and caused quite a scene.

May turned white with fear, and began thumping Annie's back, for she had heard that it was a good thing. This made the old man so angry, that he gave May a knock with his crutch, which so horrified Annie (who had only got a crumb in her throat), that the crumb went down and she was well directly. May felt very indignant, although it was only a very slight knock the old man gave her.

As soon as Annie was better, Old Peter sat down in his chair, and seemed as if he could hardly breathe; he pointed to the door, and gasped "Open it." The children quickly obeyed him, and he soon revived.

"Whatever made you go a-choking and a-frightening me in that way, missy?" he said, turning reproachful eyes on Annie.

"I got a crumb in my throat," said Annie, "I felt as if I could hardly breathe."

"Well, I'm glad it's gone down. I begs your pardon, big missy, for using th' crutch, but it did rile

me to see you a-beating of your sister there; I spose you thought it 'ud help 'er; maybe you didn't mean to hurt 'er, eh?"

"Oh no!" said May, "I've been told it is a good thing to do, but I don't know, I'm sure."

"Then we're friends again," said the old man, "ain't we? I didn't mean to 'urt you, missy, any more than to keep you from a-beating of your sister."

Annie laughed. "May never beats me," she said, "and we're all friends again. Aren't we, May?"

"Oh yes," said May, getting mollified. "Are you better?" she said, turning to the old man.

"All right, missy, thank you, it's only for a minute or so I feels so queer, and only sin' my Sarah Anne died as I comes on like that."

"Will you let us hear about Sarah Anne," said May, "for we can't stay much longer."

"Well, I gived you my word, and I'll keep it, if you wish, but I gived my word about th' battles to th' little missy, and if you can't stay long, I can't tell you both, which shall it be? It seems to me as if Sarah Anne was more a Sunday tale. I allers thinks on 'er most o' Sundays; if you could come then, I could tell you about 'er, and about th' battles to-day."

"I don't think mamma would like us to come on Sundays," said May, "but I'll ask her."

"Then you will have th' battles to-day?"

"Yes, please," said May.

"Well now, little missy, I'll begin by saying, never you a marry of a red-coat, when you's grown up; it's nothing but misery and misery, the lots o' miserable widders I've seed, to be sure! Soldiering's all grand enough when you've to go parading about like a lot a new pins; but when it comes to mean being dirty, and hungry, and your clothes hanging on you as if you was pegs in a wall, and what there is a-patched and a-darned till you don't know hardly whether you're a red-coat or not—I tell you, missy, it's very different to marching to a band, a-playing of beautiful toons and having lots o' lassies looking and admiring, and a-thinking how grand you are."

"Didn't you like being a soldier, then?" said May.

"Aye, aye, missy," said the old man with brightening eyes. "I'd go again to-morrow and 'list if I'd my poor leg back, and if they'd take me; but that's different to being a soldier's wife; and I don't want little missy to grow up with th' notion that's a good thing. No, my wife just died from th' worry, worry, worry as she had about me, for she wur very fond of me, tho' I

says it as shouldn't, and I made 'er a good husband, tho' that's between us and th' wall, as you may say. Yes, she wur a good wife to me, but sickly and of a pining disposition, she was allers wanting cheering up. I used to say to 'er, 'Cheer up, old woman,' and she says to me, she says, 'That's right, George, let's cheer up,' but then she'd soon get down agen, so that it was a continual cheering of 'er up, and when she died it near broke my heart to think I shouldn't have nobody to cheer up no more. But howsoever, little missy wants to 'ear about soldiering. Well, I 'ardly know where to begin. I wur a sergeant when I went to the Crimea, and I came back a sergeant-major, which wur no disgrace, an course. Did ye 'ear about th' battles?"

"No, I wasn't born," said Annie, "I should be nearly grown up if I had been."

"How stoopid of me," said Old Peter, "why it only seems like t'other day; but, an course, it's seventeen year ago, now. Well, I wur not at th' first battle, I wur ill. It did cut me up to think I wurn't there; but, howsoever, I wur at Inkermann, and that were stiff work. We'd more men agen us than we knew how to get rid on. Jest as you thought you'd got 'em back a bit, on they comes agen, like a lot o' wild

beasts as they was and nothing better, a-spiking of our men when they was down. Wull, we never turns our backs on 'em. No, no, up they comes, and we's at 'em agen and agen till we were near spent, and comrades were getting knocked down on all sides. Curious I didn't get touched, just a bit o' my coat-tail off wur all as came nigh me. But it's not for babies such as you to hear all the horrible things as happens in battle; I never told my Sarah Anne, and I don't think it's fit for you. Howsoever we won the day; them French chaps came in a-trotting like a lot a ponies, almost a-skipping they was, and they did good service and no mistake, and I's not one as grudges 'em th' praise on't, not as we hadn't th' hard work first, for we had to keep them Roosian critters back as best we could."

Here Old Peter stopped to take breath, and immediately May took advantage of the opportunity to remonstrate with him on calling her and her sister babies.

"You needn't mind telling us about the war," she said, "because we are not babies. Why, I'm nearly ten and Annie will be eight next month."

"You are not babies, eh? Well, well, be jest what you likes in your own 'pinion, you ain't much

more nor babies to me, who'm turned over of seventy-five; howsoever, little folks likes to be grow'd up, and old uns often wants to be young again; there's no a-satisfying of nobody in this 'ere world, I'm thinking."

"Please do go on about the war," said Annie, "I do so want to know about it because I've got to write to Herbert, and he'll be so disappointed if he doesn't have a long letter."

"Now, little missy, you take an old man's advice and don't you be a-palavering of Master Herbert about th' war, as if it wur grand and foine. He'd soon wish hissel' back with his mamma, I can tell you, with a day of the 'sperience some of our young officers had; not but what they was brave enough, jest doing as th' men did, and bearing up like brave men as they was; but war ain't the thing for a little chap o' seven to think on; and I's tell you no more, 'cept as I got my leg took from me at jest a skirmish and nothing more; and I wur riled to think as it didn't get took off at a bigger affair; howsoever, it couldn't be helped."

"Didn't it hurt dreadfully?" said Annie, looking horrified.

"Yes, pretty considerable, I warrant you, missy; Master Herbert wouldn't a liked it. But I got took

off to the ship after a bit, but I wurn't o' any more use; so, thinks I to mysel', I'll jest go home to my Sarah Anne, and we'll have a quiet time for a bit. But, howsoever, I said I'd tell you about 'er of a Sunday if you could come, so I'll stop now. I suppose you'd better go home to your mamma, eh?"

"Yes, we had better say good-bye now," said May; "and we'll come in and tell you when we can come to hear about Sarah Anne."

"We are so much obliged to you for the ginger-bread and ginger-beer," said Annie, "and I'm so sorry I made you ill with choking."

"Well, well, that's no matter; but do be careful, little un; t'ain't comfortable to choke, you knows."

"No, indeed it isn't," said Annie, laughing.

When the children reached home they were in a great state of excitement about the fun they had had with Old Peter, for his curious way of talking amused them so much that they had often hardly known how to keep from bursting out loud with laughter.

Mrs. Aston was quite amused with their hot faces, and she was glad to hear that they had got on so well with the old man.

"But, mamma," said May, "I don't know

what you will say, for he wants us to go some Sunday to hear about his grandchild, Sarah Anne. He was so fond of her, and she died, and he is going to tell us about her, only he wants to do it on Sunday. May we go some Sunday afternoon after church?"

"I will think about it, my dear. I like the old man's idea of wanting to tell you about her on Sunday; but I will consult papa first to see whether he would mind."

Mrs. Aston asked Mr. Aston if he objected to the visit being paid on Sunday, and as she found he did not she allowed the children to go and tell old Peter that they would come some Sunday very soon to hear about Sarah Anne.

The old man seemed quite pleased to think he was going to have his little visitors on a Sunday. Then he asked them to stop a while as he had thought of some interesting bits to tell them from his campaigning experience.

The children had not long to stay, but they could not resist the temptation of a few tit bits.

"I ain't got no ginger-bread nor ginger-beer today," said Old Peter, "for I didn't know as how you would come; howsoever, I 'ave thought o' summat as

I thinks was uncommon fun, though at th' time I wur near driven wild.

"Wull, to go to th' p'int at once, 'twas in th' Crimea as there was th' most awful gales o' wind as ever I seed in all th' days o' my life. No, I never anywheres saw the like. Wull, th' wind roared like that."

Then Old Peter gave a roar, which made the children jump up with fright.

"I wur only showing you as how it wur," he said, with an amused twinkle in his eye; "you needn't be jumping up."

"Please don't show us any more," said May, "it's dreadful."

"Eh, it wur, I can tell you. Wull, th' wind blew and th' rain came down, and I could 'ear it in my tent. Thinks I to mysel', th' tent 'll soon be down, and th' pole snaps, and down the wet canvas comes, a-smothering me a'most. Wull, I creeps out as well as I could, and then I sees th' tent carried up by th' wind; and I looks agen, and there's a big table with four legs a-careering about up in the wind, and not only that but a couple o' cheers a-careering for company. It wur odd. Wull, thinks I, I'll keep out o' their way anyhow; so I goes a-careering too; but as

soon as I gets free of the table there's the cheer jest a-going to seat itself a-top o' my head. Fortunate for me th' table soon tired o' such freaks, and with a great bang comes down and breaks 'er legs, but th' cheers thinks they'll enjoy theirselves, and if they comes down a bit they rises aloft agen, till at last I wur right glad when they wur all to bits, and then legs and pieces didn't seem so bad to come a-tumbling about. How would you ha' liked that, little missy?"

"Not at all; but we needn't fear having winds like that in England, need we?" said Annie, rather alarmed.

"I never seed the like afore or since as them winds, so I don't think you need feel afraid," said Old Peter, with his withered-up smile and low grunting laugh.

The children laughed heartily with the old man, and he seemed as pleased as they did.

"It's allers rare fun to tell one's 'sperience," he said, "when it's comic, and 'twas a good thing as a fellow could turn his ill-luck into a laugh. Don't you think that they was my table and cheers. No, no; they comed out o' two different officers' tents nigh th' place where I wur. Th' table wur out o' my colonel'

tent, and when, after th' storm, I told him th' skittish way in which she'd behaved, he roared and seemed nigh killed with laughing, and I 'eard him a-telling a lot o' t'other officers, and it made 'em a bit o' fun all round. Th' colonel wur a raal gentleman from th' sole o' his feet to crown o' his head; I never seed him anything else, tho' he's been dressed a'most in patchwork often and often, but whatever figure he'd ha' made, I'd allers ha' saluted him. I should ha' known him if he'd been up this 'ere chimney, I should. He says to me one day, laughing, 'Ah, Sam,' he says, 'there's no taking you in, you's too sharp by half.' And I wur sharp arter him, I real loved him, I did. I used to follow him about when I could, all unbeknown though generally, and I saved him from many a rub. I raal can enter into th' feeling o' dogs as follows their masters, I never sees one but I thinks that's loike me a-follering of th' colonel; and when they gets a kind word, or a bit of a stroke, I allers knows how pleased they are, as I was when the colonel spoke. Of course he didn't stroke me—"

But here Old Peter stopped, for the children were shaking with laughter. The idea of Old Peter being stroked seemed too ridiculous. They were all enjoying themselves with the fun, and making the little

house ring again, when loud knocking was heard at the door; and when Old Peter opened it, there was Emma come for the children, for they had stayed so long that Mrs. Aston had sent for them.

Old Peter's face quite changed; he did not get into a temper, but he looked daggers at Emma, and only relaxed to say good-bye to the children, and to ask if they'd come next Sunday to hear about Sarah Anne.

They said they would try to come next Sunday in the afternoon. So they left the old man feeling very gloomy and miserable without his two little friends.

When they reached home, they told their mamma what fun they had been having with Old Peter. She was very much amused, and said she should go and see him herself before Sunday.

The next day May was looking at her garden, which did not seem so neat as it ought to have been, so she called Annie to have a consultation about it.

"Now I think those roses want a great deal of attention," said Annie. "It strikes me, ma'am, that you ought to wash the insects off them. I saw Smith squirting away, and I think you had better do the same."

"Then will you get the rake while I wash the

rose trees?" said May, looking very dull at the disagreeable business she had to do.

"What a face!" said Annie. "You look as if you were going to be whipped. I'll do the rose trees for you, if you'll rake."

"Oh, thank you," said May, brightening up.

So Annie ran and asked Smith for the syringe, and he brought her a pail of water, and she began squirting the water on the rose trees.

Soon May gave a jump as if she had been shot.

"How dare you wet me in that way?" she said, for Annie couldn't resist the temptation of giving her a little shower. Annie laughed, but as she saw May was really angry, she went and helped her wipe herself, and then she ran and brought her a clean holland garden frock, for she dare not let Emma know what she had done.

May was really a good-tempered child, so she did not scold any more, but ran into the arbour; and there the frock was changed, and the wet one was hung up, and the children had great fun over the state of mind Emma would be in when she found out that she had lost one of the frocks.

Then the raking and squirting recommenced, but Annie took care not to give May another

shower, though the temptation was very strong sometimes.

At last the garden really looked very tidy, and Annie got the rose trees to look much cleaner, although she was rather in despair when, having got one of them particularly clean, she saw a whole procession of green-flies walking up the stem again. You may be sure they never reached the top, but it seemed almost impossible to kill all the rest.

"Really, May, it's quite hard work cleaning your roses; I think you ought to give me one of the very best on Sunday to give to Old Peter, to reward me."

"Very well, you shall chose which you like best," said May.

So on Sunday afternoon they got their mamma's leave to pay Old Peter a visit, and then they went into the garden, and Annie had her choice of the roses. She chose a very pretty pink bud, and May took a white rose, and then they started for the almshouses.

Old Peter seem to be expecting them, although the door was not open. The room looked particularly neat, and the chairs were all arranged in a circle; the kettle was singing away on the hob, and the tea-things were set out on the table, with three cups and saucers, and

some beautifully cut bread-and-butter, and preserve, and gingerbread—in fact quite a feast. The children looked at one another in surprised pleasure, and Old Peter's eyes beamed again with delight.

"I thought as how we ought to be 'appy of a Sunday, little missies, so I ups yester arternoon and invests in summat as I thought you'd like. It's all of the best, you can tell your mammie. I'd not give you anything as wasn't of the first quality. No, not I. Did you know your mammie came to see me th' other day, eh?"

"No," said the children in a breath. "Mamma never told us she'd been."

"Well, we had a discussion. She wants me to go to th' church, and I don't want to go; as I said, religion's not in my line; howsoever, she's that like my colonel's missus, as I can't refuse 'er, so next Sunday I goes, but I've never been sin' I left a-soldiering, so as how I'll sit it out is more than I knows on."

"But you can read, can't you?" said Annie.

"Aye, aye, missy, I can read; I ain't a bad scholard, although I never read a word till I wur five-and-twenty, and then I were teached by a gentleman. Oh yes, missy, I can read, though it's more nor I can

say I'll find the place in the book; howsoever, I can 'ear th' gentleman as talks, that's one thing."

"I'll find your places all ready for you," said May, "if you'll let me have your prayer-book before next Sunday."

"Eh, well, I've no objections—in fact, I'll be obliged to you, for when a fellow gets past seventy, his eyes ain't so good as when he wur young."

"Very well," said May looking very bright. "I'll find all the places for you, and put markers in."

"Thank you, missy. Wull, what do you say to a cup o' tea, 'fore I begins a-telling you of my poor Sarah Anne?"

"It will be very nice," said May.

So the old man poured out the tea and handed round the eatables, during which he kept up a discursive sort of talk, but when the little meal was finished, he buttoned up his coat right up to the chin, and put his boots on, and then he began:—

"I wur married when I wur thirty year of age, to my wife as I tells you on, 'er as wanted cheering up. Well, she wur an oncommon good wife, and I never found no fault on 'er, but 'er want o' cheering up, which were a bit trying sometimes; howsoever, as I said afore, I got that used to it, that when she died I

missed 'er terrible, 'cause I'd nobody to cheer, for my Sarah Anne were left a baby, and I didn't take to 'er when she wur a very little un; I mean th' mother of Sarah Anne you've heard me speak on. Wull, she growed up and I wur very fond of her, and she married and lived several years, and died, and soon arter her husband died, and they left me their little girl, Sarah Anne, as was my grandchild, to take care on.

"Now this wur not long afore th' war in th' Crimea broke out, so you may think when I found I should have to leave 'er I wur in a takin'; howsoever, there wur nothing for it, but to get a woman as would look arter 'er. So 'fore I went on shipboard, I set all straight for the lassie, and I left 'er with a sore heart. I see 'er now in 'er bit of black frock, and her white apron and little cloak, all a-shouting at me as I went off, though I couldn't 'ear a word on't.

"She wur a pretty little thing, white and fat, with light 'air and blue eyes, a handsome little lass as ever you see'd, though I say it as shouldn't.

"Wull, th' day or two arter I got to England, and afore she'd quite got used to me without my leg, she took ill. Th' doctor said it wur fever, but it were a low sort, so as she was sensible all the first part of 'er illness, and a good deal arter that.

"Wull, wull, she did behave pretty and no mistake. She soon got used to me without my leg, and she wur that fond of having me to nurse 'er. Dearie me, my specs wants wiping, jest excuse me stopping a bit whiles I gets the mist off 'em, it will gather sometimes; thur, thur, now where had I got to, please, little missies?"

"You got to where Sarah Anne liked having you with her," said May.

"Oh, eh! Wull, she wur so patient, and when she wanted a drink, she'd say to me, 'Grandfather, would you please give me a sup?' So pretty, wasn't it? and she'd put 'er arms round me and hug and hug, only feeble, but it wur nice, and she'd talk of 'er books as she'd had at the Sunday-school, and she'd pray beautifully, and for me too, though I know'd it wur no good, 'cause I weren't worth 'em; still I liked to 'ear 'er."

Here Old Peter's spectacles became so very misty that they took a long time to get wiped, so Annie said, "Mamma says we may pray for everybody, so why did you think it was no good Sarah Anne praying for you?"

"Wull, wull," said Old Peter, "perhaps it wur of good, only I've not found it out yet."

"But you haven't been to church to try and get good," said Annie again.

"No, it's my own fault," said Old Peter; "howsoever, Sarah Anne wur religious and no mistake, and though I'm not I weren't sorry as she wur. She died the beautifullest death, all bright and happy, a-asking me to foller 'er. Yes, I'll go to the church next Sunday—I'll go, or I'll never get to 'er, I s'pose."

"Oh, do go," said May, who was nearly crying, "Mamma says we can't go to heaven unless we love the Lord Jesus, and so I want you to love Him, please."

"Aye, aye, missy, I'll pray—I will; your mamma said I must, and please God I will this 'ere night. Wull, wull, it's queer how things comes round. I never thought as how I should ever pray, but howsoever, I'll try."

There was a slight knock at the door, and nurse came quietly in. Old Peter didn't seem to mind her at all, but he asked her civilly to take a chair. She did so, and the old man did not say a word for a few minutes. Then, as nurse rose, and told the children they must come home, he rose and said "Good-bye" very gently and silently.

Except for a short visit to take the prayer-book the children did not see Old Peter for nearly a fort-

night, for Naomi had sent urgent messages, asking the children to come and see her, as they had not been so frequently since they had known Old Peter.

When they went to visit him again, they were very pleased to see, on a little side table, a large old Bible, which Old Peter showed them, and told them he had rummaged it out of an old chest, and he meant to use it. Then he showed them the pink bud and white rose, acting as markers to two chapters which Mrs. Aston had found for him to read.

They were very much pleased to see what a good use their roses were put to, and they were still more pleased when Old Peter told them he always meant to keep them in his Bible.

CHAPTER VII.

THE GERANIUM.

"THEM's the best, missy, but you get more of these for a penny."

"You're sure they are not poison?" said Annie, hesitating whether it would be safe to make a purchase.

"Pison! Well, I never heard the like! and do ye think I'd pison your mother's child?"

"N—o," said Annie, not quite understanding who her mother's child was, but comprehending that the pedlar-woman was indignant that she should fear her sweets might be poison.

"I'll have a pennyworth of the best, please," said Annie.

"Very well, my dear, and I'll eat one to show ye there's no pison in thim."

"Thank you," said Annie greatly relieved. "May

always eats some of my sweets before I do, and then I'm sure they are all right."

The pedlar laughed so heartily, she nearly choked herself. Annie stood amazed, and really fearing the woman had gone out of her mind.

"Don't ye looked scared," said the woman, "but to think ye'd git your sister pisoned afore yoursel' near killed me, it did."

Annie looked quite shocked; she had never had such a thought, for she never really thought there was poison in the sweets she bought, but she was very nervous about it, and May was not.

"Oh, I don't want to poison May," said Annie colouring. "She's not frightened and I am. She does not a bit mind tasting for me."

"Never mind, missy, it's always as well to know your bread's buttered on the right side. Could ye p'int the way to Lawyer Gammon's place?"

"I'll show you," said Annie, tying the strings of her garden hat.

So she started with the pedlar up a lane at the back of the garden, but all of a sudden a dreadful fear came into her mind, and she flew away as fast as her legs could carry her.

The pedlar stood amazed, and thought the child

must be in fun, so she walked on leisurely, smiling to herself at the quick way in which Annie got over the ground. After running for some time, Annie ventured to look round and to her surprise and relief no one was near. The truth was, she took it into her head that perhaps the pedlar was going to steal her, and so without stopping to consider whether it was likely or not, she ran away.

But she didn't like being alone much more than she liked being in dangerous company, so she turned into another road, knowing it would lead her home, when she came face to face with the pedlar and Smith.

"Oh, Smith, I'm so glad to see you," said Annie, nearly crying with the relief it was to feel safe again.

"Whatever has took you, missy, to run away," he said; "here's Mrs. O'Brien were afeared you might lose yourself, and I met her, and she asked me to help look for you."

Annie felt very much ashamed. She could not tell the pedlar that she was afraid of being stolen, and she did not know what to say, so she wisely said nothing but that she was sorry she had frightened them. Then turning to Smith she said, "Please take me home to mamma."

So the pedlar bid her "Good-bye," thinking what an odd child she was, and when she was alone with Smith she told him her fear.

He laughed heartily, and told her he had known Mrs. O'Brien for several years, and she was a respectable, hard-working woman.

"Why, missy," he said, your mamma has been a-visiting of her in the Infirmary, where she's been for a burn as she got, and she's took such a fancy to missis as she likes a-coming about th' place, and she told me as how she'd tasted the sweeties for you."

Annie turned crimson, for she didn't want her peculiar ideas about the fear of poison in sweets to be spread abroad.

"Please don't tell about that, Smith," she said pleadingly, "I can't help being afraid of poison."

"Never you need fear of me a-telling, missy," said the gardener good-naturedly. "I'll be mum."

"Thank you," said Annie, greatly relieved.

It was at a small door at the farther end of the garden that Annie had made her purchase, and as they came near it, they saw May peeping out with a very anxious face, for she couldn't think where Annie had got to, and she had been all over the house and garden looking for her. She looked quite relieved

when she saw her with Smith, and she ran to meet them.

"Where have you been, Annie?" she said, "I've been looking for you everywhere, and I got so frightened."

Smith answered, "She got scared, missy, so you'd better take her in to missis and let her rest."

As soon as Smith had gone, Annie told May about her fear, and she laughed so much that Annie forgot her annoyance and her fright, and joined in the merriment.

Mrs. Aston was out when Annie returned, but as soon as she came in, Annie told her about buying the sweets and running away from the pedlar.

"It must teach you, my dear, not to buy sweets at the door; you ought to have known I should not like it. You were very fortunate in having Mrs. O'Brien to deal with. Suppose some gipsy woman had given you something to stupify you, and had carried you off with her."

Annie turned white with the bare idea of such a thing.

"Oh, mamma," she said, "I shouldn't have gone stupid for a long time, and I should have kicked."

"People can be made 'stupid,' as you call it,

very quickly, and then my pet couldn't have kicked."

"I'll never go to that garden door again," said Annie. "Couldn't we have it locked, mamma?"

"No, my dear; there is no danger if you keep in the garden. And now about Mrs. O'Brien. She is a nice, respectable sort of woman, and I think we must try and look after her a little."

"Where does she live, mamma?" said May.

"She has a room in the same house that Mrs. Andrews live in, who keeps the little school near to Wright the baker's."

"Oh yes, I know the house," said May. "We could go and see her sometimes, and you would like us to take her some flowers; wouldn't you, mamma?"

"Yes, when she is at home, but she goes round with her basket, and although she generally returns at night, she is often late, so that we must try and find out when she will be in."

So one day when May had been sitting with Naomi, nurse called for her by arrangement, to take her to see Mrs. O'Brien, for it was one of the days she was more at home.

"And who'd belave it?" said Mrs. O'Brien, when she found out who had come to see her. "It's glad I

am to see ye, and any o' your mother's children are welcome to my heart and to my home. For a swater lady nor your mother niver stepped in shoes, my dear—no, never stepped in shoes."

"Annie's coming to see you next time," said May. "You know my little sister Annie, don't you?"

"I knows 'er well, but she's not so much littler nor you, missy, my dear."

"No," said May, "but she's two years younger."

"And to be sure that's a long difference, my dear. Two years is two years all the world over, it is. I'd make the most of it, my dear. And may I make so bold as to ax why th' little missy didn't honour me with the sight of her swate face the day?"

May didn't know what to say, nor where to look. Nurse had merely left her at the door, so there was no refuge in her; and the truth was that Annie was so afraid of Mrs. O'Brien asking her why she had run away, that she would not come, hoping that after a little while her flight would be forgotten.

"And don't ye know? or maybe ye don't want to tell," said Mrs. O'Brien, noticing May's confusion.

"I know, but I don't want to tell, please," said May, wishing she was far away from Mrs. O'Brien's room.

"And I'll not be th' body to ax yer, though an shure I should like to know; I was swate and kind to her, and gave 'er measure above all she could ax, but I'll say no more, though maybe she didn't like the looks of an owd woman such as me, who's gone footing it round and round to get her bread, many and many a year, och! many a weary year."

May hardly knew whether she was to answer or not, but she said, "Oh, Annie likes you very much, and she will come with me next time;" for May thought to herself, she would not let her off on any account; it was so very uncomfortable, and then Annie had promised to come. When Mrs. O'Brien heard that Annie liked her, it seemed quite to soothe her, and she did not say any more about the "rounds she'd gone many a weary year."

May asked her if she was fond of flowers, and if she would like some out of her garden.

"Och, my darlint, and I should be plased. The pretty critturs flowers is! I'll put thim on th' mantel-shelf in th' best o' my pots; to be sure I will. Flowers is mighty genteel, and it's gentlefolks as gits them on their tables, I knows. And 'twas your mother, dear lady, as brought thim to the 'Firmary; and says she to me, says she, 'I've brought ye some flowers and

some fruit, Mrs. O'Brien, which I 'ope 'ill plase ye.' And says I, a-bowing low to th' sheet—for I were in bed—says I, 'I'm your humble servant, an' kiss your feet I wud if 'twas not in bed I were.' An' she laughs so swate, an' looks so fine and so gintle. Och, dearie me, it's no use a-talking, but I'd walk my feet off to save her a pin prick, I would, my dear."

May liked to hear her mamma praised in this way, although she could not quite understand it all.

"I am glad you like mamma," she said; "Annie and I love her very, very much. She is so kind, and never cross except when we are naughty, and then she says she's not cross, but grieved; only it seems like what we call cross, but it isn't really, for I've noticed other children's mammas are angry with them often after they have asked forgiveness; but mamma is just as kind and loving as ever when we're humble and sorry for what we've done wrong."

"'That's just it,' says I to th' nurse as tended me; I says, 'That's a lady swate as new butter, and softer nor oil—swate oil too.' And she says to me, 'It's true, Mrs. O'Brien,' she says, 'a more beautifuller, nor more kinder nor charitabler lady never breathed. I knows 'er 'fore you did,' she says to me, 'for she's a-visited 'ere, and a-brought of fruit and flowers, and

sint hares and birdies, and I dun know what, for th' sick. I likes her bettermost of all th' ladies as comes 'ere,' she says; 'an' a good many comes as is well to be spoke of, but Mrs. Aston, I says, is number one wid me.' And says I to her, 'She's double number one wid me.'"

"But that would be number two, Mrs. O'Brien," said May, looking very sly; "twice one makes two, you know."

"Och, the darlint! ye have me there," and Mrs. O'Brien's sides shook again with laughter. "Och! an' that 'll stand me in a joke for all my rounds and rounds, it will; for I says 'always 'ave a joke ready, it makes folks buy,' an' now that's a raal un. Why, missy, ye ought to ha' been born in th' old country, ye's too clever by 'alf for English, ye are. Begs yer pardon, though, I was a-forgetting as yer mother's an English-woman. Well, she ought to ha' been Irish, says I."

May had no desire to be an Irish girl, particularly with such a refined specimen of Irish womanhood before her! but she was too much of a little lady to say so, for her mamma always taught her that a real lady ought to hurt people's feelings as little as possible, and to be as courteous and kind to a poor woman as she would be to a rich one.

So May merely smiled, and as nurse conveniently appeared at the room-door for her at that moment, it saved her from having to answer.

"It is time for you to come home, now, missy," said nurse.

"Och, an' I'm sorrer to part wid ye," said Mrs. O'Brien; "won't ye take a chair, ma'am," she said to nurse, "and stay a bit longer wid 'er?"

"No, we must go, thank you," said nurse; "but I'm sure that Miss Aston will come to see you again."

"Oh yes," said May, "and I'll bring my sister next time."

"Do plase, missy, and tell 'er as I've got some beautifuller sweeties than afore, and I'll taste thim all for 'er."

Nurse and May both went away laughing, for they knew Annie wouldn't be at all pleased that Mrs. O'Brien remembered her nervousness about poison.

When May gave Annie Mrs. O'Brien's message, she was horrified.

"Isn't she ever going to forget I told her about you tasting the sweets for me? I don't care to go and see her."

"I'm sure she won't say it if you ask her not," said May, "because she is very kind, and oh so

funny! You really must hear her talk about mamma."

"Oh, if she's very funny I shall like it; she was very queer the other day, it was that made me think she might carry me away.

"Well, she is queer, but she's Irish, you know, and they are funny sometimes—at least mamma says so; but mamma likes her very much."

In about a week's time Mrs. O'Brien came to the house, hoping to catch a glimpse of her dear Mrs. Aston, but she was out, so then she asked if she could speak to the young ladies; and as they were in the garden, she was taken to see them there.

The children were very busy putting the garden tidy. Annie was squirting water over the rose-trees, and May was cutting off the dead flowers all about her garden.

Annie, hearing a sound of footsteps, looked up and saw Emma conducting Mrs. O'Brien towards them, with her well-remembered basket. Her heart first almost stood still, and then beat pit-a-pat, pit-a-pat in such a way, that the syringe dropped from her hands, and she felt inclined to take to her heels again.

"May," she gasped, "look who's coming. Oh, help me; what shall I do?"

May looked up in alarm, thinking Annie must be ill; but she soon knew the cause of her fright, as she caught sight of Mrs. O'Brien.

She had just time to say, "It will be all right," when Emma said that Mrs. O'Brien wanted to see them so much, that she had brought her into the garden.

"I begs yer pardon, missy, but I couldn't pass the house widout a-trying to see your mother, and Emma says she to me, 'Missis is out, but the young ladies is in the garden.' So says I, 'If ye plase I'll spake to thim,' and she says, 'Do, Mrs. O'Brien,' so civil; so I comes, and 'opes I'm not inducing of myself."

May looked puzzled, for she couldn't think what "inducing" meant; she did not guess that Mrs. O'Brien wished to say "intruding," but could not quite manage it.

However, May said, "Mamma would have liked to have seen you, and she wishes us to bring you some flowers to-morrow; but perhaps you would like them now, I have some very pretty ones."

"No, no, my dear," said Mrs. O'Brien, "it's not for flowers I'm come, but for your own swate selves, as is flowers as purty as ever grew in the most splendidest garden as ever I see'd, and gardens more

beautifuller ye couldn't see if ye went for rounds and rounds of many more of miles nor I've been."

Annie couldn't stand such talk, she dare not look at May, but ran away to laugh comfortably and to get a rabbit to show Mrs. O'Brien, which she hoped would keep her from thinking of sweets, and of her having run away from her in the lane.

"I niver see'd running the like o' that," said Mrs. O'Brien; "really ye wouldn't think as legs could go so quick. Ye should ha' seed her that day as she went to show me Lawyer Gammon's house."

"Oh, here she comes with two beautiful rabbits," said May, to take away Mrs. O'Brien's attention from the subject of running.

"Them is pretty critters as ever I see," said Mrs. O'Brien, "and they're as fond of ye! Oh, dearie me, they're a-nibbling of your pinny, miss."

"They won't hurt, they never do anything wrong. Do you, my pretties?" said Annie, stooping to kiss her rabbits.

"Now you must look at my garden, Mrs. O'Brien," said May; "haven't I got a lot of geraniums and roses out?"

"Ye have, my darlint; shure and shouldn't I be plased with a few for some children I knows as lives

without a bit of a flower from one year's end to t'other, 'cept a bit of a daisy or dandelion."

"I shall be very glad for you to have some for them," said May, and she plucked a pretty bunch of geraniums and roses, and mixed some green up with them tastefully, and then she ran in and found a little piece of pink ribbon, with which she tied them up and gave them to Mrs. O'Brien.

"They'll be raal plased, missy, the poor little critturs! and they're so clane, and behaves thimselves more like the raal gintlefolks, as ye be yourselves, than children as lives in but one room, my dear."

"Poor things!" said Annie. "How many are there of them?"

"The mother and six children, and a handful it is says I every time as I sees thim a-playing there; and they does it so clane, a-niver making of mud-pies and spiling their pinnies. No, no, when they're clane they keeps clane for a bit; and when they're dirty, and it ain't often, they don't get grimed in as t'other children do."

"Do they ever get cakes or sweeties?" said Annie.

"Niver a bit, 'cept as I gives thim now and agen, missy."

"Poor things!" said Annie, "how dreadful it must be. I've got two pennies and a halfpenny, will you give them some sweeties, please, from me? How many will all that money buy?"

"All of it won't only buy each o' thim a ha'porth, my dear, 'cept th' baby as cannot ate swates at all, at all. And it's fortunate, my dear, for it can't be jealous of t'other five."

"Then please give the flowers from May and the sweets from me; and when shall we hear about them?"

"Hear the darlint! and ye'd like me to fly on thim telegraps to tell ye, I belave! I'll be back in two days, and thin I'll be plased and proud to see ye both; an' I'll tell ye about the poor starved little children, and anything more as ye'll ax me, my dears."

"Very well, Mrs. O'Brien, we'll ask mamma if we may come on Friday; but if it should be wet would you come here?"

"I'll see, if I've a leg to stand on, my dear. I may come if it don't pour cats and dogs. Good-bye, my little ladies; and remimber me with riverent duty to your swate dear mother."

When the old pedlar had gone, the children were surprised and delighted by Emma bringing them each a letter. May's was from Kitty, and Annie's

from Herbert; they had been enclosed in one from their aunt to their mamma.

May could read writing well, so she was soon enjoying herself; but Annie, after vainly trying to make out Herbert's large, round hand, gave a deep sigh to attract May's attention.

It was quite successful, for May looked up, and seeing her trouble, she put her own letter aside to read Herbert's to her.

It was full of joy at the thought of meeting in one month's time, when they would play at being soldiers every day.

Alas! soldiering had lost its charms for Annie since she had known Old Peter. It would be too dreadful for Herbert to lose a leg, and to get as ugly and old as he was. She tried to fancy him, as May was reading, with a wooden leg and withered face; but somehow it was very difficult to make Herbert's little round fat body, and merry fair face, like Old Peter.

When May had finished, Annie thanked her, and then said:

"May, do you think Herbert ever could be like Old Peter? It seems to me that he never could be so ugly; for though I like Old Peter very much, you know, I think he's dreadfully ugly."

"He might lose a leg if he were a soldier, but I don't think his face could ever be as withered up; but then he might get killed altogether, you know."

"Yes, he might. I wish Herbert would play at something else."

"Perhaps he will, if you ask him," said May. "What do you think Kitty says, that Frank has got on so well at school, and he is coming here with her when she comes. I'm so glad."

"I'm not," said Annie. "He's so cross. I don't like him at all."

"Oh, but I do!" said May. "I wonder——"

"Well, go on; what do you wonder at?"

"Never mind, dear. I'm not to tell."

"There, that's just it—such secrets, as Herbert said. I don't like secrets. I'll have one with Herbert," said Annie.

"Very well, I don't mind if you do," said May. "I don't have one because I wish it."

This appeased Annie a little. She thought it was all that horrid Frank; and then as Mrs. Aston was seen coming down the garden, both the children ran to meet her.

When Friday came it was a lovely day, and so leave was obtained to pay Mrs. O'Brien a

visit. Emma took the children and left them with her.

"It's plased I am to see ye, my dears," she said, "and it's plased and delighted as thim little 'uns were wid the flowers and the swates, as ye sint them, and they says to me, 'Mrs. O'Brien,' they says, 'plase tell the young ladies as we's oncommon obliged for the swates and the flowers; and plase curtsey for us to the ladies, as mother says you ought.' So I've five curtseys to make, and here's they are."

Bob, bob, bob, bob, bob, goes Mrs. O'Brien.

The children were so amused, that Mrs. O'Brien had to wait a while before she could finish her story; then she went on—

"When I got to their room door, I knocks, and two little v'ices says to me, 'Come in;' and in I goes, and there on the floor was the baby lying on some rags with the rest of the little ones, and the two biggest was watching of thim all. So I shows thim the flowers, all as quiet as could be, and up gits the big 'un; and she says, I know a gintleman as 'ud buy thim all; for one day I see'd him buy some of a girl as sells flowers.

"'Very well,' says I, 'rin, my dear, and sell them,' for thinks I, niver much of food 'as gone down that

bit o' throat. I sits there and shows all through my basket to t'other child; but I gived her no swates, only a bun as I'd got; for thinks I, no swates shall they have but little missy's.

"But I waited and waited, and she didn't come; and I was jist a-thinking I must be going, when in she comes a-blowing and a-rinning, and seemed near frantic with joy, and she throws down half-a-crown on to the floor.

"'A gintleman threw it me for the flowers, he said they were so beautiful got up,' she said. 'Oh, what will it buy? I wish mother would come in.' I knew their mother would like them to have something good; so up I gets, and rins and buys thim each a mutton pie, and some tarts; not as I spent much of the half-crown, for I knows the woman at the shop, and I tells her about thim poor little dears, as hadn't tasted tart or mate I don't know when; and says she to me, 'Mrs. O'Brien, I'll give you the tarts for the little things, for I've known you this many a year, and I feels for thim as gets no swates, and it's a favour to yourself, as I would be so doing. So I rins, reglar rins in, and they all comes round, and didn't they eat and enjoy thimselves; and then I gave thim little missy's goodies, and they were as smiling and continted as ye niver see'd, nobody more."

"Poor little things," said Annie, "I wish they could come here, and have plenty to eat."

"Yes, I wishes as your dear mamma could ha' see'd them, I'm shure her tinder heart would ha' felt for thim; and I've been thinking as I'll bring the two biggest to see your mamma the next time as I goes my rounds."

"Oh, do," said Annie; "I should so like to see them."

"But where could they sleep?" said May; "they couldn't go back the same night."

"No, my dear; there would be plenty of room for thim with me, and I should like for your mamma to see thim, such little swate critturs as they are."

Emma appeared at the door, and said the young ladies must make haste, for she thought there was a storm coming. Annie didn't need to be hurried when she heard that news. She was in such haste to get home, that she had hardly time to take some sweets that Mrs. O'Brien offered, and then she wanted to run all the way. But Emma said she wasn't as young as she used to be, and she couldn't run much. So Annie was obliged to be satisfied with urging her on with all the entreaties she could think of.

Happily, home was reached before the storm broke, and then the children went into the drawing-

room to their mamma, and when the storm had abated they told her about the poor children who had been so long without meat, and who were so delighted with the sweets and tarts.

Mrs. Aston was very much pleased with both her children; for it made her glad to think they were really wishing to share others' troubles and sorrows.

"Would you like to have these two little children here for the afternoon, and give them some tea?" said Mrs. Aston.

"Oh, it would be delightful," said Annie. "Poor little things! I should so like to see them have a good tea."

A few days afterwards, Mrs. O'Brien brought the two eldest little girls—such clean-looking children, with fair hair and white little faces. May and Annie felt rather shy with them at first, for Mrs. O'Brien went away when she had talked to her dear lady, as she called Mrs. Aston.

"What is your name?" said May to the eldest, who was about eight years old.

"My name is Grace, and my sister's is Maggie. We takes care of the children, us two does. Mother said she couldn't spare us for long, because of my baby and Maggie's children."

"Well, you will only be away for one night," said Annie; "so won't you play while you can? Do come and see my rabbits."

Grace and Maggie brightened up at the thought of rabbits.

"I once saw a rabbit in a cellar," said Maggie, "but it was brown, and not near so pretty as these."

"No, I don't like brown rabbits," said Annie; "black and white are my favourites."

"What a lot of money they'd bring!" said Grace; "why, it would buy lots of things, what you'd get for these 'ere, 'cause they're such very grand ones."

"Yes; but I wouldn't sell them for anything," said Annie. "I never think of such a thing."

"No, like as not," said Grace, remembering that Annie was rich, and she was very poor.

"Please may we see where the flowers came from?" Grace continued, after a pause.

So May took her, to see her own little garden.

Grace stood still, and did not say anything aloud; but May saw she was busy counting. At last she said, "What lots of bunches of flowers, like as you sent to me, could be made out of these! and if they only fetched threepence apiece, what a sum it would be!"

"Well, I couldn't spare all my flowers," said May, colouring, "but you shall have some bunches to take back with you to-morrow."

"Oh, miss, I'm so sorry; I didn't mean to ask for them," said Grace, looking very hot and uncomfortable. "It's only as I never sees anything but I thinks to myself, what would it fetch? for we go so often without food, that I gets in the way of reckoning up what things would buy. Mother has so often to send me round the corner, you know, and then I wonders what I'll get."

"Where is round the corner?" said May.

"Why, some people call it Uncle Sam's, but it's really the pawn-shop. Mother can't bear me going, or going herself; but she says, 'What are we to do when we's got no food?'"

"Do you sell your things, then?" said May, puzzled as to what a pawn-shop could mean, for she mixed it up in her mind with prawns; and yet she was sure Grace meant selling things.

"Well, it isn't selling, exactly; it's borrowing money—that is, you take a frock, and the man as is in the shop gives you a few shillings, and you never get it back again, except you take a ticket, and pay a lot more money than you got for it; so, as mother

says, it's a losing game; and it's only when she has had no cleaning all the week that she does it."

"What a dreadful place it must be!" said May. "I'm sure I shall be very pleased for you to have all my geraniums. I'll pick you a lot to-morrow, and I'll ask mamma if you may have a large basket to carry them in. I'll make them all up into pretty nosegays for you. I know Annie will help me."

"But oh, miss," said Grace, "mother will say I asked for them, and she will never let us ask for anything except from God, and we often ask Him when we have nothing more to pawn."

"But don't you pray every day?" said May.

"Yes, we always say our prayers, but I mean we pray hard when there's no food and nothing to pawn; and mother says she's often noticed as we gets help then."

"I'm sure mamma would say you ought to pray hard every day," said May. "But as to the flowers, you didn't ask for them, you know; I heard you counting, and I thought you would like them."

"I should like them very much," said Grace; "and oh, if I could only see the gentleman as gave me half-a-crown."

May was so full of her idea about the flowers, she hardly knew how she should wait till the next day.

"I shall so want to know if you sell them all," she said: "you will tell Mrs. O'Brien exactly what you get for them, won't you?"

"Oh yes, miss," said Grace, with demure but great happiness. "I'll tell her every ha'porth I get by them."

Then the flowers were forgotten for a while in some games, but the poor little children couldn't stand much exertion, they were too weak, although Mrs. Aston had thoughtfully ordered them some bread and meat and milk as soon as they came.

They enjoyed their tea very much; the sweet cake with currants was so very good.

After tea May quietly slipped away to tell her mamma about the flowers. Mrs. Aston thought her plan of making nosegays a very good one, but she said she must not strip her garden.

Fortunately for Grace, May's garden was very full of flowers, particularly of variegated and scarlet geraniums, so that there was a prospect of a nice basketful to sell.

The next morning May and Annie were up betimes, in fact they awoke about four in the morning, only Emma, who slept in the next room, was so cross when she saw two white little figures entreating to be

allowed to get up, that they dare not stir again until six, when the sound of their talking and laughing prevented Emma from getting any more sleep, and so she got up, and let them do the same.

There were twelve lovely little nosegays made up by breakfast-time, packed in a large basket with moss, which was made wet to keep the flowers fresh.

Grace and Maggie were delighted with them when they arrived in Mrs. O'Brien's donkey cart. As for Mrs. O'Brien, she nearly went into hysterics over them; the result of her admiration was that all the flowers were sold to her customers before they had a chance of reaching the town where Grace and Maggie lived. The children were very sorry that their mother couldn't see the nosegays, but who can tell their happiness when they counted out four shillings to her as the result of the sale.

"We sold them at threepence a bunch," said Grace; "but one lady gave a shilling, when Mrs. O'Brien explained how we got them, and told as how the young ladies had made them up."

"Now, Mrs. Turner," said Mrs. O'Brien to their mother, "you take the advice of a woman as knows what's she's about. My swate lady says to me, 'Mrs. O'Brien, I should like Grace to go to school, and I

shall be plased to pay for her,' says she, 'but what's to be done with the baby?'"

"Says I, 'That's a puzzler, my lady,' says I; but I considers, and then I says, 'What do you say to Maggie going to school till baby's on his feet—he'll not be long—and then Grace can go.'"

"'Yes, Mrs. O'Brien,' she says to me, 'that's the plan. Then plase tell Mrs. Turner I'll pay for Maggie until Grace can go to school, and by that time,' she says, 'I hopes Mrs. Turner will be able to pay for Maggie; for,' says she, 'I'll write to some ladies at Harbury, and see if I can get her full employment.' Now, Mrs. Turner, if you're a sinsible woman, as I takes you for, ye'll take the advice of my swate lady, and Maggie will go to the school."

"I shall be very glad, and I'm sure it's very kind of the lady," said Mrs. Turner, her sad, pale face lighting up with hope.

So you can fancy how happy May and Annie were when they heard Mrs. O'Brien's account of the Turners, and that all the flowers had been sold. And when they heard that the four shillings would buy Grace a new frock, they both ran to see if there were geraniums enough left to sell which would buy Maggie one too.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE CARNATION.

"OH, what a love! Annie, do come here, there's such a sweet little thing peeping in at the gate. Look at her, the darling! Do let us go and speak to her?"

"Let us call her in," said Annie, "you know mamma doesn't like us going to the door."

"I'll go and fetch her in. Little girl," said May, "would you like to come into the garden and look at the flowers?"

But there was no answer, only two shy blue eyes, and a finger more vigorously sucked.

May put out her hand and said, "Do come in, dear, what is your name?"

But there was again no sound, and the little figure moved off. May thought it was no use trying to get her in, so she moved away; but just as she had nearly

reached her garden she caught sight of a little blue frock actually within the garden door.

She ran back, but away ran the little figure, and by the time she had got to the door she was quite out of sight.

"It's no use," said May, "she's too shy; but what a little love she is, and she was so prettily dressed too."

"Perhaps we could coax her in with one of my rabbits the next time we see her. I have never seen her before; have you, May?"

The next day the children were in the garden again, and Smith was busy wheeling in gravel, when the little blue dress appeared again, and Annie caught sight of the owner's little face peeping in at the door.

She didn't call the child or move towards her, but she nodded and smiled, and then went on with her squirting operations. After a short time she took another sly peep, and she saw the little blue girl had ventured in a little further; but as soon as she saw Annie looking she began to retreat towards the door. So Annie began her squirting again, and after a while, without looking towards the garden-door, she went off to her rabbits, and got out one of the tiniest and prettiest and walked quietly down to the door.

She kept very quiet, as May was busy in another part of the garden, and she thought it would be such a triumph if she could lure the little child in all by herself.

But as she got near to the door she could not see her, and when she asked Smith if she had gone, he said there was no one about. It was very disappointing, and Annie was just going to carry her rabbit back again when she heard a very tiny sigh, and turning round she saw the little blue girl trying to hide behind a tree, but she was quite in the garden, and Annie felt she had caught her at last.

"Isn't it a pretty rabbit?" she said to her, making the little thing run a little way. It looked so funny that little Miss Blue gave a wee laugh, and then feeling frightened at her own small voice, the finger went up to her mouth, and she seemed as if she were going to be a rabbit and run too.

But Annie took up the rabbit, and stroked it, and then held it close to Miss Blue Frock, and she couldn't resist the temptation to give it a little fairy stroke; then she seemed to think it so nice, that she gave another and then another, till she laughed with delight; and Annie put it into her pinafore, and she nearly toppled over with it, for though it was very

small, she was very small too, and so she found it rather heavy. Then she popped down, just where she was, and made the rabbit comfortable; and, without saying a word, she seemed as contented as if she had sat there always.

Annie was so amused, that she longed to attract May's attention, but she was afraid of frightening the little maid after all the trouble she had taken to overcome her shyness.

"I does 'ove bunnies," said the little thing. "I tink dey is so pitty, and you 'ove bunnies too?"

"Yes, I do. I've lots up at the other end of the garden. Will you come and see them, dear?"

"No, please."

"What is your name, dear?" said Annie.

"Rosie."

"What a pretty name! I should like you to see my sister, dear, she is in the garden. Will you wait while I call her?"

"No, please," said Rosie, looking as if even bunny must be disturbed if she had to make any more new friends.

"Well, I won't call her; sit still, please. Where do you live?"

A little nod of the head was all Annie got.

"Where is that?" nodding her head in the same way Rosie had done.

"I don't know," said Rosie. "I want to go; please may I take bunny."

"I couldn't spare it, dear," said Annie; "besides, it must be fed, you know."

At this bad news the little lip went down, and two big tears began to flow. Annie didn't know what to do. She as heartily wished May would come, as she had hoped she would keep away when she didn't want her.

"Don't cry, Rosie," said Annie, tenderly, stooping to kiss her.

But she got one of Rosie's fat little fists stuck in her eye.

"Oh!" said Annie, "you mustn't do that, Rosie." And when she got her eye completely open again, she saw no tears on Rosie's face, but angry hot eyes. She nearly laughed, though she felt rather cross, for Rosie's face looked so funny; it was so fat and babyish, and yet her eyes looked so determined.

"It isn't kind to poke in that way," said Annie; "you might have put my eye out, and I'm sure I've been very kind to you."

"No, you want my bunny."

"It's mine," said Annie, really getting quite alarmed, and afraid that her rabbit would be taken before her eyes by this bit of a child.

"You gave it to me, and I's going to take it to Toppy."

"No, I didn't give it to you, dear; I only lent it to you to nurse. I must have my rabbit;" and Annie gently tried to get hold of it, trying to protect her eyes with the other hand in case of another poke. But this time Rosie tried a new plan. She held the rabbit tight, and screamed with all her might. This nearly electrified Annie, and May came flying, thinking Annie really had got into the hands of gipsies this time.

You can imagine how astonished she was to see the "little love" sitting on the grass screaming, with Annie's poor rabbit held tightly in her little fat hands.

Annie quickly explained how it was she came to be in such an uncomfortable position.

"Oh, you mustn't cry," said May. "Perhaps some day Annie will give you a rabbit; but that mustn't be taken from its mother, dear. You shall come to see it every day; so don't cry;" and May stroked her hair, and talked kindly, without trying

to get hold of the rabbit, though Annie was nearly crying to see the poor little thing so unmercifully squeezed.

So, after a while, the screams abated, and then all of a sudden Rosie, after giving bunny an extra squeeze, threw it right in Annie's face, and then jumped up and ran away, before the children had recovered their astonishment.

They went to the door, but no one could be seen, and they could hardly believe Rosie could have got away so quickly.

"I couldn't have believed it," said Annie. "Such a little quiet thing, and so shy! I'd such trouble to get friends with her; and then she turns out a regular little black pussy. My poor, poor pretty! I wonder it's alive. I never will let her touch one of my pretties again."

"How queer it is," said May. "I should like to go and tell mamma about her."

"I wonder who she is," said Annie. "Perhaps mamma may know."

So, when the children went in, they told their mamma about Rosie, and asked her if she had any idea where she lived.

"I think she may belong to the new baker at the

end of the lane. Poor little dear! it is sad to think of her getting into such a temper. I think I must try and find her out."

"Oh, do, mamma," said May. "She is such a pretty little thing; and I fancy she must be nice, too, although she was very passionate."

Mrs. Aston was passing the baker's, a day or two afterwards, so she went in and asked if he had a little girl called Rosie.

"Oh yes, ma'am," he said; "she is our only child, and a great pet; but what makes you ask, ma'am, if I may make so bold?"

"She came and played with one of my children, and she became very fond of a rabbit of hers, and seemed very much grieved to part with it."

"That accounts for it," said the baker. "She ran home, the other day, looking very hot, and we could see she had been crying; but she couldn't tell us why, until, as her mother was putting her to bed, she said she couldn't say her prayers, she'd been so naughty; and when her mother asked her why, she told her some story about a bunny, and pushing at a little girl's eye, and her mother couldn't make it out. But she told her to ask to be forgiven, and then she went to bed happier; but ever since she has wanted

to see the little girl whose eye she poked at; and we didn't know who it was."

"I should like to see her, if you have no objection," said Mrs. Aston.

"We shall be best pleased, ma'am. Will you walk upstairs?"

Mrs. Aston was then taken to the parlour, where Mrs. Wheeler, the mother of little Rosie, was sitting, sewing, and Rosie was on the rug playing with her dog Toppy.

"This lady has come to see Rosie," said the bake to his wife.

"How do you do?" said Mrs. Aston. "I have found out that it was your little Rosie who took such a fancy to my little daughter's rabbit."

"Oh, ma'am," said Mrs. Wheeler, "I am afraid she did more than that; for Rosie has told me she poked some little girl's eye."

"Well, she has not damaged it," said Mrs. Aston, "and I hear she is sorry about it."

"Come here, Rosie," said her mother; "this is the mamma of the young lady you tried to hurt."

Rosie's eyes filled with tears. "I's so sorry," she said. "Will the little girl fordive me?"

"Oh yes," said Mrs. Aston, drawing Rosie to her

and kissing her, "and I think she will do more than that. I think she will give Rosie a bunny next year, when she is older and able to take care of it."

"Oh, t'ank you. How long will next year be, mammie," she said, turning to her mother.

"Not very long, darling; and then what a rich little girl you will be."

"You had better come and see the rabbits this afternoon. Would you like to come?"

"No, please," said Rosie.

"Why not? Are you afraid of the little girl being angry?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"Oh, but I'm sure she won't. I will tell you what I will do. I will send her with her sister to fetch you, and you will see how kind she will be."

"T'ank you; and may I see the f'owers, too, please?"

"Oh yes, of course."

Mrs. Aston then said good-bye, and left; and in the afternoon May and Annie came to fetch the "little love."

As soon as she saw Annie she ran to her and said, "I's so sorry; please fordive Rosie."

Annie was delighted. She soon got plenty of kisses, and when she reached the garden they decided that May should have her first and Annie afterwards; so May took her to her garden and showed her the flowers, and Rosie was so taken with some bright carnations that she asked for one.

May plucked one for her, and put it in her hair; but as she couldn't see that, she had another for her hand, but she stuck her little nose into it so vigorously that it soon looked shabby and untidy, and then she wanted another. Having found by experience that flowers did not stand such very determined smelling, Rosie kept the second better.

May had cut her geraniums and roses so much for Grace and Maggie, that the only bright flowers she had in her garden were carnations; so, as Rosie would have nothing else, they gradually got round to the rabbits.

Here Rosie's excitement became so intense, that the carnation dropped from her hand, and as it fell very near the wire of the rabbit-house, one of the old ones was just on the point of tugging it in, when Rosie saw the danger and set up such a cry of distress that the thief flew away in a fright, and hid itself at the other end of the hutch. The carnation was rescued,

but little Rosie would still sob, so that May felt very uncomfortable.

"Let us go and get another flower, dear," she said.

So another carnation was got, and then Rosie wanted to go and see the naughty bunnies again.

May called Annie to show the pets, and she safely held the flower, so that there were no more cries, except small ones of delight as the little bunnies were seen, especially the beauty of all, which Rosie had nursed on her last visit.

"Oh how pitty!" said Rosie; "will you give me that bunny in one year, please?"

"Yes," said Annie; "you shall have it, but I think you will like a baby bunny best, and this won't be a baby then."

"May I have a baby bunny just like it, please?"

"Yes, if I have one, and if I haven't got one just like it, you shall have one of the prettiest I've got, if you will be kind to it."

"Oh yes," said Rosie. "I wish I might have all the baby bunnies, too."

"No, dear," said May, "Annie can only spare one."

Rosie looked sad, but she soon brightened up.

"I love you now," she said to Annie; "and you too," turning to May, "but I love Toppy best."

Annie couldn't help laughing, for her mamma had told her who Toppy was.

"Why do you laugh?" said Rosie, beginning to suck her finger.

"Because you love your doggie best."

"I've known it longest," said Rosie.

The children laughed again, but they were obliged to stop quickly, for Rosie's lip dropped.

"Never mind, dear," said Annie; "will you try to catch me if I run away?"

"Yes," said Rosie, but then she looked at her carnation, and said, "No, t'ank you, I'm afraid it will spoil my f'ower."

"I will take care of your flower," said May.

Rosie looked at it, half gave it, and then took it back.

"No, t'ank you, I'd like to take it to mammie."

"Do you want to go home, then?" said May.

"Please, t'ank you," said Rosie.

So May and Annie took her home, and she gave them each a very pretty kiss, and said, "T'ank you," again.

"She is a little dear," said Annie, as they entered the garden.

"Yes," said May, "but so queer; she's so babyish

and yet so grown up in her ways. I'm sure after she wanted to go we couldn't have got her to stay if we had tried ever so much."

Nothing more was seen of Rosie for a few days, although the children got Smith to leave the door on the latch sometimes when they were in the garden. But at last Mrs. Wheeler came up to the house to say that little Rosie was very poorly, and she wanted to see the young ladies.

So May and Annie went back with her, May first running into the garden to get a carnation.

As they were going, Mrs. Wheeler told them that she couldn't ask them to stay long, as little Rosie seemed so weak, she felt anxious about her; but she was very much obliged to them for coming.

She led them upstairs to a very clean little bedroom, and there in a tiny bed lay little Rosie. The children were quite struck by the change in her, she looked so ill. Toppy was on the bed, and one little hand, no longer fat, was holding the dog's ear.

"Tiss Rosie, please," she said, when she saw them.

So they kissed her, and asked her how she was.

"Oh, I's soon be better. How's bunny?"

"Very well," said Annie, "he's been playing about a great deal."

"I'm sorry I was naughty about bunny when I came to see you the first day."

"Oh, never mind," said Annie.

"Mammie says the Lord Jesus doesn't like naughty tempers. I so sorry," and the tears began running down the little cheeks.

"Please don't cry," said Annie, nearly crying herself; and then, suddenly feeling very generous, she said, "Would you like to have bunny now, Rosie? Because I shall be very glad to bring him if you like."

The tears immediately stopped, and little Rosie's face beamed with delight.

"Oh, mammie," she gasped, "may I have it?"

"Yes, darling, if the young lady can spare it."

"Oh yes," said Annie, feeling quite happy in giving so much pleasure. "Shall I fetch it now?"

"Please," said Rosie; then, as her eyes caught sight of the carnation May had brought her, she said, "Oh, mammie, another f'ower! please put it with the others."

Then for the first time May saw the two faded carnations in a glass near Rosie's bed.

"Oh, do throw those away," she said, "and I will fetch some more while Annie gets the rabbit."

Then they went for the rabbit and flowers. As soon as they got outside, Annie's heart began to fail her.

"Do you think she will squeeze it very much, May, and will it be fed properly?"

"Oh yes, I think it will have food enough. You could bring it some; and then, the other day, she did not squeeze it until she was afraid of your taking it away."

So Annie got the little rabbit, and May her carnations, and they went back to Rosie. She was delighted with the rabbit, and stuck it right under Toppy's nose. He didn't at all like it, and began to growl, but when Rosie tapped him and told him to be good, he left off, though he kept one eye open to watch the intruder.

Rosie would smell all the carnations before she put them into the glass to have some water put to them, but she was satisfied with a little smell at each.

Then she was so tired with her excitement and her exertions that she lay down with one little hand on Bunny, and one on Toppy, and went

to sleep. So the children very quietly left the room, and went home and told their mamma all about Rosie.

The next morning Mrs. Aston went herself to inquire, and she came back looking very sad.

"Rosie is very ill, dears, I think we ought to pray for her."

So Mrs. Aston and the children prayed for Rosie, but God knew it was best for her to go and live with Him. In the afternoon May and Annie were sent for, as Rosie wanted to see them.

This time Toppy and Bunny were not even in the room, only May's carnations. Poor little Rosie looked very ill.

"Mammie thinks I'm going to live with the Lord Jesus," she said, "so I don't want Bunny, please; and will you have Toppy too?" looking at Annie.

Annie burst into tears, but May struggled to answer, "Yes, she will have them, and take care of them for you."

"The flowers I'll teep," said Rosie. "Please tiss Rosie, she's s'eepy and wants to go to heaven."

May and Annie kissed her, but they could not speak. Mrs. Aston then came into the room and led the children out. She took them home, and then returned

herself to Mrs. Wheeler, as she thought she might be a comfort to her.

The next morning Mrs. Aston came to see the children before they were up, and she told them that dear little Rosie had died late the night before. They were so sorry, and when Mrs. Aston told them that Toppy and the rabbit were to be sent over for Annie, there was another burst of tears.

"Oh, mamma," said Annie, "I do so wish I had let Rosie have the rabbit when she wanted it, but I thought she would hurt it, and it wouldn't get fed."

"You were right not to give it to her then, dear, for of course you didn't know how it would be treated. Poor little Rosie was so sorry that she got into such a temper; her mother said for more than a year she believed she had loved her Saviour, and she always said she loved Him best, and nothing made her so sorry as to be told she had grieved Him when she had given way to passion."

"Dear little thing," said Annie. "Oh, I wish she hadn't died."

"She is much better off, my love. She seems to have been such a lovable little thing; but her mother says she has always been very passionate, but much less so since she understood about the

Lord Jesus. Just before she went to sleep for the last time she said, 'I know Jesus is coming to fetch Rosie soon. I's so glad. Rosie will always be good then, mammie.'

"Then her mother kissed her, and as she saw her mother crying, she said, 'Don't cry, mammie, Rosie will be a bright little angel, won't she?'

"'Yes, my darling,' said her mother.

"'I's so s'eepy, mammie, good-night; tiss me, mammie,' she said, and she never woke again in this world."

"I wish I was as good," said May.

"Pray to have the same faith, my darling," said Mrs. Aston, "and then you will be like her."

Little Rosie was buried in the pretty churchyard that the children loved, and May and Annie threw flowers on the tiny little coffin after it was lowered into the grave.

They were nearly all carnations and white roses, and when the little grave was made, three of May's best carnations were planted on the top of it.

The children never passed through the churchyard without looking at Rosie's grave, and they never saw a carnation without thinking of their lost little friend.

CHAPTER IX.

CONCLUSION.

"Oh, I know something delicious, beautiful, delightful!" said Annie, and then she took a flying leap over a corner of May's garden and ran away.

May followed. "Now, Annie, don't tease; what is it you know? Do tell me, please."

"I know something," echoed Annie's voice from the other end of the garden.

"I shall go in and ask mamma," said May.

"Mamma is out, and Emma is busy, and as cross as two sticks. You'd better ask me, ma'am. What will you give me if I tell you directly?"

"A kiss," said May laughing.

"Oh, I don't care for kisses," said Annie. "I can get a kiss any day. What will you give?"

"A piece of geranium."

"No, indeed."

"Well, a rose. I won't give more; there are only two left."

"I'll take that, ma'am. Now listen, we are going to the sea-side!"

"Oh, that is delightful! When are we going?"

"In a fortnight, and the cousins are going with us, but they'll come here for a week first."

"I'm so glad they'll be with us," said May, "it will be such fun."

Next week the cousins arrived. "Hurrah! here we are again," said Frank. "How do you do, aunt? how do you do, everybody."

May could hardly believe her ears. Was this the gloomy stiff Frank she had known before?

"Well, May," he said, when he saw her watching him. "How are you, old girl? I hope you are not going to lecture me because I haven't written, eh?"

"Oh no," said May, "but I can't believe you're the same."

"Kitty will soon tell you I am, for she's had no peace of her life since I've been back."

"Yes, I have," said Kitty; and then, as Frank ran off, she said confidentially to May, "He's so nice now, May; a great tease but such fun, and never gloomy as he used to be. Oh, look at those two."

"Those two," were Herbert and Annie, forgetful of all the world besides, walking off with their arms round one another's waists to see the rabbits and tell their secrets.

"How funny," said May. "I expect Annie will tell him he's not to be a soldier."

"Why not?" said Kitty.

"Oh, because we've got to know an old man who's been a soldier and lost his leg, and he's frightened Annie about soldiering, so I think we shall see no more games of that kind."

"I think old soldiers are great fun sometimes," said Kitty; "we know an officer who tells delightful stories."

"But this man's not an officer; he's much greater fun, because he talks so oddly. We go to see him at least once a fortnight, and mamma reads to him once a week. He's so fond of mamma, and she's got him to go to church and read his Bible. He was so bad-tempered when we knew him first—not to us, but to other people—and now he's much quieter. He's so fond of Annie, she runs in oftener than I do, and he keeps a store of gingerbread for her, so I expect she will take Herbert there a great deal."

Was he one of the people "you took flowers to?"

"Yes, Annie gave him a rose, that's how we got to know him. We like him best of all the grown-up people we go to, except Aunt Sarah and Aunt Martha, and of course they're ladies, and it's different going to them."

"Yes, I hope they will ask us all to go there before we go to the sea; it must be such fun."

"I daresay they will, they're so kind. Oh, I must go, there's Frank raking my garden. Will you come down, dear, as soon as you are ready?"

"Yes," said Kitty, "you'd better go and have a confab."

May ran off and came to Frank out of breath. "Oh, Frank, do be careful," said May, remembering that he was more vigorous than patient in garden work.

"I thought I should bring you," said Frank laughing. "I remembered you always liked to see what the rake was doing to your valuable property. What a time you've been."

"I've been talking to Kitty; I longed to come, but I couldn't get away. How have you got on?"

"Oh, famously. It's a jolly school, and the fellows are very nice—at least some of them. I tried that on

and stuck to it, and I think it has made me a brighter chap."

"Oh," said May, "you mean praying. Oh, I'm so glad;" and the tears came into her eyes, and dropped on to her frock, for she dare not get out her pocket-handkerchief, lest Frank should see.

He saw fast enough, and loved her for it, but he didn't think it manly to show it, so he went on raking, and said, "Your garden's splendid. What lots of money you must have spent on it."

"I've spent a good deal, but Smith's given me things sometimes that mamma didn't want, and they have helped to fill up."

"That geranium's a splendid fellow, did you buy it?"

"No, Mrs. Morris, an old woman we know, gave it to me. We take her flowers sometimes, and some one gave her this geranium, and she thought it too good for herself, she said, and she would make me have it."

"A convenient sort of body; pity but what they'd sent her some more. You might have got a nice stock."

"Ah, I shouldn't have taken them, because she's so fond of flowers! I'm going to take her a bunch before we go away."

In fact, May and Annie had a great deal to do before they left for the sea. What with their friends high and low, and their visitors, and May's garden to put to rights, and Annie's rabbits to arrange for, their hands were quite full. All the friends were to have flowers before they went, so the days were portioned out, that time might be had for everybody.

Naomi was one of the first to be visited. She looked very sad when she heard her little friends were going away, but when May promised her a letter she brightened up wonderfully. May left her a very pretty nosegay, which Naomi said she should try to keep alive until she came back, and if it wouldn't keep, she should press some of the flowers in a book.

"I'm so thankful I'm so much better, miss; the doctor says, with God's blessing, I'll be up and out next summer."

"Then you must come and see my rabbits," said Annie.

"Yes, miss, I hope so. I should be pleased. Have you heard how Jane is, miss?" said Naomi, turning to May.

"Oh, much better; I had a letter from her a fortnight ago, and she said she could walk without crutches, and that she was getting quite fat. She's

looking forward to the time when she will be our maid. Mamma has told her that she may in a few years, if she is strong enough, and she is already looking forward to it. The doctor at the hospital has written to mamma about her, and he says he thinks she will be able to do light work."

"If I get quite well I should like to come too, miss. Couldn't I have a place with your mamma?"

"I daresay you could; I will ask mamma, she is very fond of you, I know."

When the children went to say good-bye to Old Peter he was almost inclined to be cross, not with them, but with the door which would creak, and the chimney which would smoke; or, at least, he was so out of sorts at the idea of losing his visitors, that he fancied they did, and that everything was going wrong.

"How long be you going for, missy?" he said to May.

"We are going for two months, and our cousins are going to stay a month with us."

"That's a weary time for an old man; howsoever, I hopes you'll come safe back agen. You'll come and see me often when you gets back, eh? 'Cause I likes

you without the flowers, though they're pretty critturs certain."

"Oh yes," said May and Annie in a breath, "we'll come. And, perhaps," said Annie, "I shall send you a little letter."

"Eh! do, missy, and I'll have it framed and put over the mantel-shelf, eh?"

"I shan't send it then. No, you must promise to put it away in a drawer."

"Well, I'll do it; then you'll write, eh?"

"Yes," said Annie, "but you mustn't show it to anybody."

So the children said good-bye to Old Peter, and left him standing at the door with his crutch, watching them. They gave him a nod as they turned the corner, and then they went to Mrs. Morris.

She looked as calm and sweet as usual, and May told her there was no doubt she had got heart's ease now, however much she might have wanted it when she was a little girl.

"You always look so happy, Mrs. Morris," she said, "I wish I always felt as happy as you look."

"The storms of life have passed over my head, dear child, and now I'm like an old ship in dock, only

fit to be moored, and made a refuge in sickness and trouble for others whom I may be allowed to comfort."

"Nurse says you are the most comforting friend she's got."

Mrs. Morris smiled. "How is she, missy? I hope she'll be coming to see me soon."

"Oh yes, she was going to bring us to-day instead of Emma, but she's so busy helping mamma. She's going away with us. She's been much better lately, and mamma thinks the sea air may set her up for the winter."

"Well, here's Emma coming for you, so I must bid you good-bye. Ask nurse to try and see me before she goes, and give my duty to your dear mamma."

"Yes, thank you. I know nurse means to come and see you," said May.

The children did not forget Rosie's grave. They went there the day before they left with a wreath of flowers, and Smith had orders to put in crocuses and snowdrops, ready for the winter.

Their affectionate remembrance of little Rosie soothed her mother, and the flowers they strewed on the little grave were often watered with her tears.

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